Axial Movements and the Human Negativity toward Nature: Causes and Consequences of the Movements in the Fertile Crescent and the Levant

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ABSTRACT

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A number of students of religion have drawn attention to what Karl Jaspers calls the "Axial Age." These scholars show that in the middle part of the millennium before Christ, fresh religious stirrings in several parts of the Old World occurred independently. The lives and teachings of outstanding men established new religious and philosophical systems that have profoundly changed the course of history. These scholars also show that these new religious and philosophical systems (axial movements) are characterized by alienation from the natural world and dissatisfaction with life in general as it actually occurs. These movements proposed salvation or liberation from this world or a transformation of it. These contrast sharply with the attitudes of primal people, for whom a healthy participation in the world is all that is desired.

We are led to ask why such negative dispositions toward existent reality had come to prevail. On close examination, we find that the climatic changes of the last fifteen thousand years B.C.E. produced major changes in the environment leading to environmental and social crises in the ancient world. Reduced rainfall ended hunting and gathering societies and also agricultural ones over large areas of North Africa, the Levant, and Mesopotamia, forcing people to take up farming along the banks of the Nile, the

Tigris, and the Euphrates. Successful farming there led to much greater concentration of population, which in turn brought about the rise of cities. Agricultural practices in ancient Mesopotamia reduced the fertility of the land and further intensified the environmental crisis. This led to struggles among the cities, militarization, patriarchy, extensive slavery, and widespread alienation from both nature and society. The empires that emerged intensified this alienation by extending the area of ecological decay, increasing oppression, and uprooting whole populations.

In the midst of this crisis, some individuals and groups devised creative ways of living and responding to the crisis. It was their response and vision that gave rise to the axial movements. While most values engendered by the axial movements were positive, they largely absorbed the negative attitudes toward nature that had become dominant.

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Table of Contents

Chapter Page

1. Axial Religions and the Human Negativity toward the Environment 1

The Ecology Crisis: A Religious Crisis.....5

The Axial Age: An Age of Ecological, Social and Religious Anxiety.....7

Green History and Religion.....11

Role and Function of Religion on the Human View of the World.....16

Resources for Eco-Social Ideals for a Post-Modern Age.....21

2. Scholars' Views on Axial Traditions 29

Karl Jaspers.....36

Lewis Mumford.....44

Robert Bellah.....53

John B. Cobb, Jr. 61

John Hick.....78

Summary.....85

3. Changes in Weather as Major Influences on Pre-axial Societies.....98

Pre-axial Humans: Subjects of the Environment?.....103

Summary 117

4. Primal Societies and the Environment.....126

Savannas and the Evolution of Human Society.....132

The Impact of Primal Cultures on the Environment.....~~139~~ 140

Summary.....~~156~~ 157

5. Archaic Agrarian and Herding Societies and Their Impact
~~Their Impact~~ on the Environment.....162

The Rise of Agriculture and Herding.....162

Ecological Impacts of the Archaic Farming and Pastoral Societies.....~~168~~ 169

Socio-cultural Impacts of the Agrarian Revolution.....~~175~~ 176

War and Violence and the Agrarian Revolution.....~~179~~ 180

Religious Worldviews of Archaic Agrarian Societies.....183

"The Fall".....192

6. The Rise and Fall of Ancient Civilizations.....199

First Phase of Urbanism: Temple Towns and Un-walled cities.....206

Second Phase of Urbanism: City-States and Walled Cities.....216

Ecological and Social Impacts of Ancient Civilizations.....221

Nature and Religion of the Lost Civilizations.....227

Summary.....235

7. Imperial Existence and the Axial Negativity toward Nature.....240

The Rise of Empires and the Environment.....245

Imperialism and the Ideology of Alienation.....249

Imperialism and the Axial Negativity toward Nature.....257

Summary.....265

8. The Axial Revolution in the Context of Imperial Cultures.....271

Three Case Studies—Egypt, Greece and Israel

Egypt.....272

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Greece.....280

Israel: A Case for Axial Anxiety.....294

Covenant and the Prophetic Movement.....305

Exilic Episode: A Consequence of the Environmental Crisis.....310

Jesus Movements in Palestine and in the Greco-Roman World.....317

Summary.....326

9. Axial Negativity toward Nature.....336

Nature, Religion and Culture.....342

10. Epilogue.....362

Toward Earthism: A Spirituality for the Postmodern Age

Bibliography.....367

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CHAPTER 1

Axial Religions and the Human Negativity toward the Environment

This dissertation is about religion and the environment. For many ordinary people these issues are peripheral to their daily struggle for existence. Nevertheless, at a time when Planet Earth is burdened with over six billion people and when species become extinct by the hour, we cannot but make these the central concerns of our life. For some of us, these are not only central concerns, but also our calling and mission.

In 1987, I collaborated with a few friends on a volume entitled World Religions and the Environment.[1] This book attempts to show how various world religions care for both the spiritual and physical worlds, and how the spirituality of each tradition could be an impetus for conservation and environmental protection. My contribution to the volume was a lengthy article entitled "Christianity and the Environment." The article looked at the contemporary ecological crisis from the perspective of my Protestant background. I was pleased that I had the opportunity to articulate my concern for the environment through my contribution to the volume. The growing interest in the conversations on religion and environment is a sign of hope, and I welcome it wholeheartedly.

Although the article "Christianity and the Environment" seemed appropriate and valid at the time of writing, it now appears to me rather superficial and polemical. Not only my article but also other articles in the volume were mere homilies and admonitions on how to protect the environment. Proof-texts from respective scriptures were invoked to endorse the homilies. Authors who contributed articles presented the environmental perspective of their respective religions and were quick to identify causes of the

ecological crisis outside their own religious traditions in forces like modern science, technology, consumerism and commercialism. One non-Christian presenter even went to the extent of blaming Christianity for the contemporary modern environmental crisis. For him and the other presenters, religion in general and, more so, their respective traditions were not the suspects. On the contrary, they saw their traditions as the panacea for the contemporary crisis. These pundits asserted that all that people need to do is to be good Hindus, or Muslims, or Jains. These authors claimed that their traditions offer sensible alternatives to the human-centered environmentalism found in Christianity. It is true that some traditions in the Indian subcontinent continue to be rooted in nature. A few are still steeped in some form of nature worship. Therefore the presenters on the Eastern Religions could be more positive about the religious sensibilities of their traditions. But supposing that adherence to the dicta of one religion or another would solve our problems is simplistic, for it does not recognize the structural problems underlying the ecological crisis. Many of these structural problems are based on religious metaphysics that sanction the modes of human-world existence and the human-centered encounter with nature. Simplistic claims for one religion or another fail to address the root causes of the environmental crisis.

In contrast to these presenters, my essay, "Christianity and the Environment," attempted to make an honest appraisal of Christian perspectives on environment. I did not evade the issues, and therefore my article turned out to be critical of my tradition, especially the Western Christianity by which I am informed. I was not inspired by reading my own tradition. At times I was embarrassed at the insensitivity of the

Protestant tradition to environmental concerns.[2] Drawing on the words of Lynn White, Jr.,[3] I censured my own religious tradition – Western Protestantism -- for its ecological bankruptcy. The article seemed out of place in the overall scheme of the book. The fact that I was critical of Christianity while other presentations saw little or no problem with their traditions made Western Christianity look like an archvillain of the environmental crisis.

Such unbalanced presentations are not fair to the Christian religion or helpful to the conversations on the environment and religion. A cursory reading of the volume against the backdrop of the contemporary environmental crisis raises more questions than it answers. Readers may be led to believe that wherever Christianity has spread and has taken root, nature must have suffered severely or that, since Eastern religions are largely nature-culture religions[4] and people in the East show reverence toward nature, nature in these parts of the world teems with all kinds of flora and fauna. Such conclusions are far-fetched. It is true that there has been widespread deterioration in the health and sustainability of the environment all over the world since the spread of the Industrial Revolution, and that this was largely a byproduct of the culture of the Christian West. Nevertheless, in comparison, the environment in the so-called Christian West fares better than elsewhere, especially in Southern Asia where people follow nature-culture religions. In countries where Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and Shintoism exist, exploitation of the environment has been ruthless and continues unabated. Thomas Derr says, "We are simply being gullible when we take at face value the advertisement for the ecological harmony of non-Western cultures." He adds,

> [E]ven if Christian doctrine had produced technological cultures and its environmental troubles, one would be at a loss to understand the absence of the same result in equally Christian Eastern Europe. And conversely, if ecological disaster is a particularly Christian habit, how can one explain the disasters non-Christian cultures have visited upon their environments? Primitive cultures, Oriental cultures, classical cultures -- all show examples of human dominance over nature which has led to ecological catastrophe. Overgrazing, deforestation and similar errors of sufficient magnitude to destroy civilizations have been committed by Egyptians, Assyrians, Romans, North Africans, Persians, Indians, Aztecs, and even Buddhists, who are foolishly supposed by some Western admirers to be immune from this sort of thing.[5]

Indeed, I was one of those foolish admirers who blindly subscribed to the supposed environmental sensibilities of eastern traditions while laying all the blame at the doorsteps of Christianity.[6] When I wrote my article, "Christianity and the Environment," I did not know much about the global environmental movements. My ignorance on several fronts is obvious in my article. Now I live in the USA and have learned about the variety of stances in the environmental movement. Exposure to Western Christianity in its cultural settings has made me change my unrefined thoughts on religion and the environment. I am now less critical of the Western traditions than when I wrote my article. I still think that the overall environmental message of the mainstream Judeo-Christian tradition – especially its Western form -- is ambivalent. It contains deep-seated assumptions that have led to the human abuse of nature despite its teachings about human responsibility for all God's creation. Nevertheless, the undue burden placed on Western Christianity, as the sole culprit of the contemporary environmental crisis, does not advance the conversations on religion and the environment.

The environmental crisis stems from a combination of several factors -- both human and non-human. Among the human factors, religion, technology, economic interests,

ignorance, wars and disregard for the non-human world play important role in causing the environmental crisis. Among these obvious causes, the foundational beliefs and practices in every religion have not received their due consideration. The problem is not confined to Western Christianity alone. The fact that Western Christianity has been cited on this score should put all living world religions on notice. It suggests that religions are responsible for the worsening environmental crisis. As Paul Shepard says,

> [N]one of the great world religions is life affirming. They all seem to dislocate and abstract *as though* taking some sign from the insignificance of life in the overwhelming geometry of mineral and astronomical forces around them.[7]

Is there any religion that is life-affirming? Shepard's charge may well be valid. As Shepard and Derr maintain, the philosophies of all major living world religions are ambivalent when they deal with the issue of the environment. Some Eastern traditions not only encourage human abuse of nature, but also are at the root of the inhuman social evils brought upon communities that are close to the earth.

The Ecology Crisis: A Religious Crisis

Steven Rockefeller and John Elder say, "The global environmental crisis which threatens not only the future of human civilization but all life on earth, is fundamentally a moral and religious problem."[8] Does this mean that religion is at fault? An often-used entree into conversations on religion and the environment is an appraisal of the contemporary ecological crisis that traces the root causes of the crisis to religion. Lynn White, Jr., popularized the debate on religion and environment using this entrée.[9] White contended that the dogmas and practices of the Western Christian traditions (as distinct

from the Eastern Christian traditions) were at the root of the contemporary worldwide environmental crisis. In White's view, Western Christianity was culpable for the environmental crisis, because it encourages humans to exercise their God-given rights over nature and this led to the human abuse of nature. White showed that the ravenous human-world relations of the Western tradition since the dawn of the colonial expansions that were followed by the Industrial Revolution largely caused the contemporary environmental crisis.

Since White's critique on Christianity, religion as a whole has come to be suspect of being the miscreant of the environmental crisis. This raises a fundamental issue about the crises in both religion and ecology. If religion and the human view of the world are informed by one another, a crisis on one front is symptomatic of a crisis on the other. The ecological crisis then entails a religious crisis, and the crisis of religion is a reflection of the crisis on the environmental front. If religion was at the root of ecological crisis, could we also say that the ecological crisis shapes religions to some extent? Were particular tenets of religions themselves shaped by the environmental crisis? Or for that matter, could we not say that religions of any tradition reflect the environmental crises of the respective epochs in which they emerged?

A crisis necessitates a response. If the response does not resolve the crisis it points toward a need for change. If the crisis is symptomatic of a deeper crisis in the structure, then the structure itself must be transformed or adjusted to the new reality. A crisis on any front, if unresolved, effects profound changes in the whole structure. Such changes often lead to the emergence of new structures. The emergence of new structures,

frequently referred to as a paradigm shift, entails also changes in the modes of religious existence and thought. If we hold that religion is a product of human encounter with and in the biological niches, any broad shifts in religious paradigms imply changes of the eco-social contexts and the human world-relations. Such sweeping changes in the religious paradigms, we believe, may suggest crises in the biological niches within which humans find themselves at the time of these shifts.

The history of religion records noticeable paradigm shifts in the modes of religious existence and thought in different epochs of social development. Some of these, although very significant, effect changes only within a locality or are confined within a particular tradition. Nevertheless, some paradigm shifts have engulfed the whole world rather uniformly. The emergence of pastoral and agricultural cultures from the hunting and foraging life-style caused profound changes all over the world in the modes of religious existence and thought with attendant pastoral and agricultural myths, cults and deities. For instance, we note that goddess cults were widespread all over the world prior to the emergence of patriarchal cults.[10] Likewise, some scholars of religion have drawn attention to another epoch in the history of religion -- an epoch profusely creative and imaginative, which they have termed the "axial age." The axial age replaced old modes of religious existence with new ways of thinking and being in the world.

The Axial Age: An Age of Ecological, Social and Religious Anxiety

The axial epoch saw the emergence of major world religions that have lasted into the present. Karl Jaspers, the first to draw attention to the axial phenomenon, argued that the

axial age – which he regarded as occurring from 800 to 200 B.C.E – was the decisive watershed in the history of religion. Following Jaspers, many other scholars of religion -- A.C. Bouquet, G. F. Moore, Eric Voegelin, Lewis Mumford, John B. Cobb, Jr., Georg Fohrer, Benjamin I. Schwarts, Samuel N. Eisendstadt, Robert N. Bellah and John Hick -- have observed that in the middle of the millennium before Christ, fresh religious stirrings occurred all over the world simultaneously and independently of each other. The lives and teachings of outstanding men -- founders of religious and philosophical systems -- have profoundly changed the course of history. Confucius and Lao Tzu in China, Gautama Buddha and Mahavira in India, Zoroaster in Persia, the prophetic movement in Israel, and Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle in Greece continue to influence contemporary thought and values. The rise of Christianity and, six centuries later, of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula can be seen as continuing the prophetic tradition of Israel. Christianity was also greatly informed by the axial thinkers of Greece.

The axial movement differed greatly from its pre-axial primal, agrarian-pastoral, ancient urban and even imperial antecedents. It ushered in a profound structural and paradigmatic change in the modes of religious existence and thought the world over. John Hick says,

> [I]n this period all the major religious options, constituting the major possible ways of conceiving the ultimate, were identified and established and . . . nothing of comparably novel significance has happened in the religious life of humanity since.[11]

When we observe the axial movement, we are confronted by a disquieting dichotomy that characterized the whole movement. We see this dichotomy infusing both positive and negative values into all axial religious traditions. The polarities and the metaphysical

tension within them keep the whole movement in a heightened state of awareness and anticipation. Its overwhelming appeal and its success over against its predecessors show that the axial movement responded to real needs. In terms of its positive influences, we see that it transformed the pre-axial cults in a radical way. Archaic cults, especially those of the agrarian and pastoral societies, were awash in gruesome, savage and bloodthirsty practices. They constantly sought to spill blood in order to appease the deities and the spirits of the world. Although axial movements liberally borrowed the motives and meanings of these pre-axial cults, they recast them in symbols, rituals and dogmas that were free of those gruesome practices. The ritual of communion carries some elements of this gory past, but without bloodshed. The axial movement did not altogether give up its gory legacy or such ignominious social institutions as patriarchy and slavery. On the other hand, we find that axial movements were receptive to fresh vistas of moral and ethical conduct in personal and social life. This openness to new thoughts had profound implications for the meaning of human life in general. Axial thought set high standards for moral and social reforms. Personal holiness, sacrificial love, service, humility, justice and peace – these were indeed a great leap forward. Such a leap was made possible by disengaging religious acumen and aspirations from human-world existence. Now the loci of religious existence had to be centered on spirituality that was both personal and transcendent. Ewert Cousins writes,

> The move into Axial consciousness released enormous spiritual energy. It opened up the individual spiritual path, especially the inner way in which the new subjectivity became the avenue into the transcendent. It allowed the deeper self to sort out the difference between the illusion of the phenomenal world and the authentic vision of reality. On the ethical level it allowed individual moral conscience to take a critical

> stand against the collectivity. And it made possible a link between the moral and the spiritual aspects of the self, so that a path could be charted through virtues toward the ultimate goals of the spiritual quest.[12]

A corollary of this quest for personal and transcendent spirituality was the rejection of the temporal world of human existence. Scholars show that the postaxial religious systems are characterized by soteriological motifs that exude negativity toward the world of nature. Human alienation from nature is an important hallmark of the axial revolution. Robert Bellah says,

> In the first millennium B.C. all across the Old World, at least in centers of high culture, [there occurred] the phenomenon of religious *rejection of the world* characterized by an extremely negative evaluation of man and society and the exaltation of another realm of reality as alone true and infinitely valuable . . . . [Now] the religious goal of salvation (or enlightenment, release, and so forth) is for the first time the central religious preoccupation [emphasis mine].[13]

Especially in Christianity, but also in Judaism and Islam, negativity toward the world is manifested in an acute dualism and apocalypticism. Apocalypticism aspires for a higher and lasting realm of human existence free from the decay of this temporal world. The alienation reflects axial peoples' dissatisfaction with life in general. Why did axial humans reject the world? Although scholars have long speculated on the source of this alienation, they have not offered any satisfactory explanation.

Axial negativity was not limited to and directed toward the world of nature alone. The negativity also affected several areas of human existence, especially the value of the human body and the worth and status of women. They too fell victim to the axial assault. It appears that these three spheres of human existence -- nature, corporeal existence and women -- are closely linked, so that negativity toward one means negativity toward the

others as well. All the great world religions, including Christianity, derive from the axial age, and they all carry this negative stance.

Dispositions that are negative toward the world and corporeal existence while being positive toward spiritual life and life beyond this world were common to all religions that grew out of the axial age. These polarities show a sense of anxiety and a discontent with human life in general in the axial mind. The turbulent history of this age also reflects this underlying discontent with life. The centuries leading up to the emergence of the axial age were some of the most tumultuous in human history. Violence and wars escalated. Warlords oppressed the peasants and the powerless. Human health deteriorated. Plagues and diseases tormented the urban and rural societies. Patriarchy, slavery, hierarchy, class structures, militarism, violence and wars – all of these together created the context for human alienation from the world and led to the rise of the axial religious traditions.

Green History and Religion

The axial mindset rose in response to many social and historical forces. Scholars of different disciplines observe it from their respective fields of expertise. Their observations show that parallel strains of influences nudged archaic societies to cross from one threshold to the other, and ultimately brought them to the doorsteps of the axial revolution. We also observe the rise of new social and cultural institutions as human societies cross from one threshold to the other. Scholars like Arther Ferrill and David Griffin show that violence and warfare escalate as humans cross successive thresholds unfold.[14] Gerda Lerner and Rosemary Ruether trace the rise of patriarchy in the

evolution of human societies.[15] On the other hand, scholars like Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and John Cobb see the evolution of human consciousness synchronizing with the advance of human culture with successive crossing of thresholds.[16]

Our conversations here seek to set the axial phenomenon and the threshold crossings in a different context. We wish to trace the emergence of axial mentality in human societies set within their biological niches and wider environmental contexts. In so doing, we follow the leads provided by scholars who saw that the axial thoughts exude extreme negativity toward nature. To understand this negativity, we need to look at the whole scenario from a wider ecological dimension. Scholars on axialism turned to the history of religion for explanations, but unfortunately this history cannot identify the root causes of the human negativity toward nature, corporeal existence and femininity. It merely tells the story of humans in relation to the divine. In terms of narrating human-world relations, the history of religion may describe the "what," but it cannot explain the "why." Therefore, we seek the aid of "Green History."

Green history is a new and growing discipline. Donald Hughes says, "Environmental history is still a new and challenging field. The researcher must read widely and combine insights from several areas of inquiry which are usually kept separate."[17] Like the science of ecology, green history is not an independent discipline. The science of ecology draws its resources from many life and hard sciences. The unique thing about the science of ecology is that it not only looks at the total picture of a biological or bioregional system, but also studies individual plant and animal species within a given biological system in relation to other species as well as to the total system. Biological

niches are organic. Every entity within a system – animate or inanimate -- relates to other entities and changes in some entities effect changes in others and ultimately in the whole system. Likewise, green history derives resources from many disciplines of science – geography, geology, climatology, paleontology, archeology, astronomy, animal, plant and human ecology, etc. -- and especially the evolutionary histories of bioregions with humans as components.

Changes in the environment occur within and without, gradually or in cataclysms. One of the important tasks of green history is to observe and narrate the story of these changes and transformations in the local environments (with humans included) in response to the planet-wide changes. It is in these broader contexts that we need to read the evolution of human societies, consciousness, violence and wars, and the history of religions. Human societies change and evolve in response to the bioregional changes that respond to larger planetary events. Thus we may view human societies' crossing of successive thresholds as those that were ultimately prompted and shaped by larger planetary events and their effects on local bioregions. On the other hand, these changes also reflect human intervention in nature and the abuse of the environment in local contexts. Here we attempt to look at one such crossing of threshold – the axial epoch. The crossing of the axial threshold caught the attention of the scholars on religion. Nevertheless, these scholars stopped short of probing the environmental causes.

Changes in societies and cultures in the ancient world (unlike the changes in the contemporary world) were caused by both planetary climatic changes and human responses to the changes in the local bioregional niches. This suggests that the human

negativity toward nature as manifested in the axial religions may be an index to the changes in the natural environment. Our study shows that the millennia preceding the axial epoch saw profound changes in the environment, especially at the core centers.[18] And human societies in these core centers went through transformations in response to these changes. We also witness the escalation of violence and wars in these regions, unprecedented anywhere else in the world. This violence often caused devastation of the environment. Was this escalation also a consequence of a changing environment? Environmental degradation may be the missing piece of the puzzle about the axial negativity towards nature.

Land and landscape gestalts engender many different dispositions toward nature, from favorable to confrontational modes. While the bountiful benevolence of nature may contribute to positive values, harsh and arid terrain may produce just the opposite. To these, we should also add ecological, social, and personal crises of values and hopes engendered by the differing modes of human-world existence. Our readings suggest that the anxiety to which axial religions responded resulted especially from two major crises – an ecological crisis and a social crisis – each contributing to the other. Although we have been well informed about the social crises of the pre-axial and axial ages, until recently we have been largely ignorant of the ecological crisis that engulfed the core centers of civilization. It now seems that the tumultuous history of the axial age was largely due to widespread environmental crises. A cursory examination of these factors offers a dismal profile of the human-world existence during pre-axial and axial epochs. The spread of agrarian-pastoral cultures and the rise and fall of ancient urban civilizations along the

perennial rivers followed by the rise of the imperial age provided the background for the emergence of the axial mentality. These transitions at those core centers are so striking that they cannot fail to capture the attention of the observer. Because of this, we now conclude that the rise of the world-negating motifs of the axial metaphysics were largely due to the social crisis that was engendered by the ecological crisis of the preaxial and axial ages.

Green history can help us to understand the reasons behind the escalation of violence and wars and the rise of many ignominious social and cultural institutions and traditions in the archaic societies. Green history can also unpack the dogmas and cultic practices that turn their back on nature. Religions with all their myths, dogmas and practices represent underlying worldviews. Religious myths derive their life from multiple facets of human existence, experience and aspirations. Although religious language and symbols may not serve as precise indexes on the actuality of human-world existence and experience, they do offer a glimpse into the context and times that engendered axial religions. Tenets like the human negativity toward nature, corporeal existence and femininity are wrapped in myths, and such myths have a vast array of actuality behind them. This background needs to be unpacked and exposed with the aid of green history. As we said earlier, green history itself is dependent on several disciplines, such as anthropology, paleontology, paleopathology, archeology, history and ecology. Those readings would inform us about the actual health and status of the environment -- the bioregions constituted by climate, seasons, flora and fauna -- and the corresponding

evolution and existence of human cultures dependent on and interacting within those environments.

Role and Function of Religion on the Human View of the World

The idea that religion reflects human attitudes toward nature prods us to look at the phenomenon of religion more closely. How do we understand religion in general? And how does religion function in its biological context? These questions lead us to a new understanding of religion. Traditionally, the discipline of the history of religion was modeled after the methodology of the discipline of history – history as the observation and narration of the human story devoid of other dynamics, external or internal. Since the discipline of history has largely ignored changes in the natural context, we now see that it is inadequate. We need a new approach to the study of religion that sets its history in a larger ecological setting.

Religion is a universal phenomenon. Talcott Parsons says, "Religion is as much a human universal as language or an incest taboo, which is to say a kinship system."[19] Although human disposition for religion is spontaneous, universally springing from the depth of the human soul, the explicit conjectures of religion are of human creation and reflect local biological niches. Religion comes into play when individuals and groups grasp realities surrounding them and reach out to invoke transcendent and immanent ultimates. The idea of the "Holy," although ingrained in every religion, is essentially about a transcendent reality in relation to the world.[20] And the idea of transcendence is understood and realized differing ways in different religions. The Nirguna Brahman of

the Hinduism and the Emptiness of Buddhism are different ways of realizing the transcendent reality in the human existence and experience of the world. These are quite different from that of the biblical-Christian deity. Religion is a human concoction shaped by human biological, social, psychological, and intellectual exigencies. Even spiritual gnosis – gained either by intuitions or by revelations -- is in some ways directly linked to the human experience of the world. Humans do not exist in a vacuum. Without the providence of nature, humans do not come into existence, much less survive. Although the human species is distinct and unique in contrast to other species and life forms, humankind is a very tiny part. Human life and destiny are dependent on other forms of life and on non-life as well. The existence of *homo sapiens* on this planet is relatively brief compared to the elongated evolution and endurance of other species on earth. It is in the context of human struggles to survive, live and pursue happiness within a given environment that religion comes into play.

The importance of the nexus between religion and modes of human-world existence is recognized by the anthropology of religion and theology. Nevertheless, this has been largely ignored in study of the history of religions. The history of religions has focused primarily on the story of humans as it relates to the development of religion and *vice versa*. However, a central issue of philosophy and religion has always been the place and purpose of human presence in the universe--a universe/world prehended by humans. Humans from time immemorial have pondered and responded in various ways to this metaphysical exigency. Every mode of human-world existence has thus engendered profound religious and philosophical questions and the attempts to resolve these have led

to differing modes of religious existence unique to the time and place in which human societies found themselves. This does not mean that every mode of religious existence ensures the health and sustainability of the environment as well as of human communities. Some modes of religious existence are detrimental to the health of both human society and the world of nature. Nevertheless, we submit that religion attempts to articulate the place and purpose of humans in the universe. Knowing the place and purpose of humans in the universe/world brings meaning to human presence in the universe and to every dimension of human-world relations.

Several factors constitute the ontology of human-world relations. The modes of human-world relations engender their respective worldviews. The world of nature can be perceived and apprehended in many different ways and human engagement with the land takes many different forms -- from artistic appreciation to ruthless exploitation for economic gains. Some of the components that go into the making of the human-world relations and the concomitant worldviews are land,[21] topophilia,[22] biophilia,[23] landscape gestalts, human ecology and climatic conditions. The pressures on human societies exerted by particular biological niches also shape worldviews and human-world relations. To this list, we should also add social dynamics, cultural and historical awareness and the evolution of the human psyche as factors that engender the worldviews. The gestalts from diverse sources that go into the making of a particular religion endow it with its unique characteristics and vitality. We see these variations markedly expressed in the pastoral and agrarian cults. The landscape gestalts of herding nomads roaming vast stretches of savanna differ from those of sedentary farming communities. And each of

these modes of existence produces its own unique brand of myths and religions. Thus one may talk about savanna, alpine, arboreal, urban gestalts and so on, each with its own distinct myths and cults. Modern humans have an ambivalent religious existence because their environmental niches are truncated. The urban and industrial gestalts rarely harmonize with gestalts derived from the world of nature, or with those of the rural and agrarian past. In contrast, ancient human groups were by and large confined to their bioregions, rarely venturing out beyond their borders. Therefore their religions came to reflect the gestalts of their bioregions. Why is Christianity different from Hinduism? Among other things, both of them reflect the ecological ethos of their formative years. As a broad generalization, we may speak of Western metaphysics as largely influenced by savanna gestalts peculiar to farming and herding communities, while Eastern metaphysics, especially those of the Indian sub-continent, as largely reflecting the alpine and arboreal gestalts. The Bible and the Upanishads can, accordingly, be construed as shaped by these respective gestalts.

Religion trades in meanings and propositions provided by these gestalts. These propositions are expressed in particular religious cults and systems. These systems serve as a language tool for articulation. In this respect, all religions aid human conceptualization in assimilating the world and human experience within it. Religious gestalts are so abstract and profound they are forced to borrow metaphors and models from the world of nature, history and society. Religion organizes human thoughts and directs human aspiration within a given world. Other disciplines, such as science, philosophy and the arts, also aid in comprehension and conceptualization. Nevertheless,

religious conceptualization is unique in the extensiveness and depth with which realities are comprehended. Although in some societies there is growing indifference to organized religions and loss of faith in the veracity of some living world religions, religion still remains (as it has been from pre-history) an important universal, shaping human thoughts and directing personal and social behavior. The reason there is loss of faith in some forms of religion is that they fail to comprehend the realities of human experiences, and thus their conceptualization fails to meet human aspirations and needs.

All religions seek to comprehend the universe and the world of nature and provide a *raison d'être* for human presence and experience within it. Religion provides a fundamental and a profound conceptual scheme -- a scheme by which humans comprehend the world around them and human experience within it and direct their aspiration both within and beyond that given world. If there is a mode of thought whose scope is to bring meaning and value to the entire gamut of human existence and experience within a given world, it is religion. No other human pursuit, no science or art, has religion's extensiveness, flexibility, and capacity to grasp and articulate human reality and the experience of humans as individuals and as community as well as human experience of the surrounding world and human aspiration with and beyond the world experienced. This does not mean that all religious conceptualizations are rational, sound and consistent. Nor does it mean that they stand the test and scrutiny of philosophy, science and history. In fact every religion has its share of inconsistencies, contradictions and spurious ideas and practices. Many religious constructs and thought forms are in conflict with hard sciences and rationality. Besides, as in the Jewish religion, the

prophets and priests of the same persuasion are often at loggerheads. The prophet himself may be leading his followers to their doom. In spite of these inconsistencies, it is only religion, which embraces all polarities, contradictions, dichotomies and inconsistencies, and makes world understandable for humans.

Resources for Eco-Social Ideals for a Post-Modern Age

While we acknowledge axial negativity toward nature, we also need to point out where in the course of human evolution and history we find evidence of a positive valuation of and enchantment with the world. We need to show a way out of the present predicament. Axial religious worldviews have led humans to be committed to an anti-nature stance and to human hope and destiny apart from the world. Since the praxis of axial religions is informed by an anti-nature metaphysics, should we not look for an alternate religious paradigm – a paradigm that moves away from the traditional human disillusionment with the world to one that will return humans to nature and reinstate them into nature and bring nature to humans and into the human-self, thus re-enchanting both religion and the world? Could that model come to serve as the touchstone for all valuations?

Every human society pursues or holds on to ideals and values that they think are perfect and superior to the ones they have left behind or considered better than the ideals of their contemporaries. This is true of modern society. As modernists, we think that our ways of life are desirable to that of the traditional cultures. We staunchly uphold the ideals of modernism as the benchmark for all valuations and civilizations. Modernism is

an important watershed in the evolution of human societies. It began in the seventeenth century with the worldviews proffered by the leading scientists of that day – Galileo, Descartes, Bacon, Boyle and Newton. The spread of "Enlightenment" in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries made modernism the dominant social paradigm. Modernism, according to David Griffin, is based on two substantive assumptions -- one, the human freedom that rejects all authority not based on experience and reason and two, the acceptance of a mechanistic scientific worldview -- a view that holds that the world is intelligible and can be perceived by human senses.[24] While these assumptions have freed humans from the constrictions of old cultures and habits of thoughts, they have engendered ideologies and movements that are even more onerous than the old ones. Some of these resemble traditional religions. Nationalism, Fascism, Capitalism, Economism, Communism, Technologism – all of these function somewhat like religions and are often called quasi-religions. These cults of modernism attempt to repress axial religions and tribal cultures. What is readily obvious is that these have no respect for the environmental sensibilities left in many tribal and indigenous cultures. The cultural products of modernism itself are in many ways responsible for the contemporary environmental crisis. David Griffin observes that ultimately modernism disenchants nature. In this age of ecology, we are doubtful about the value of modernism to our greatest concerns. We need to look elsewhere, perhaps to the primal epochs of human existence, for standards of positive valuation. Griffin confirms this by writing,

> *Modernity,* rather than being regarded as the norm for human society toward which all history has been aiming and into which all societies should be ushered -- forcibly if necessary -- is instead increasingly seen as an aberration. A new respect for the wisdom of traditional societies is

> growing as we realize that they have endured for thousands of years and that, by contrast, the existence of modern society for even another century seems doubtful. Likewise, *modernism* as a worldview is less and less seen as The Final Truth, in comparison with which all divergent worldviews are automatically regarded as "superstitious." The modern worldview is increasingly relativized to the status of one among many, useful for some purposes, inadequate for others [original emphasis].[25]

Since our query is about the health of the environment, modernists' disposition toward nature cannot serve as the norm. Even positions that call themselves postmodern may not offer the resource needed for critiquing pre-axial and axial human-world dispositions. Much of the postmodern scholarship originates in the West, and therefore seems onesided. As Ewert Cousins writes, both "modernity and postmodernity" are Western phenomena, and our present and immediate future is a global phenomenon."[26] They also grew from the aberrations of the axial thought. We desperately need to hear the voices from the East; but at the moment, they do not seem to be loud and clear. We are therefore forced to look elsewhere -- to those epochs where the human disposition was to a large measure positive toward nature. Could the primal epoch serve as a touchstone for critiquing other cultures and epochs? The primal epoch and contemporary indigenous societies prod us to ask how the erosion of values concerning nature, women and the human body came about. Nevertheless, contemporary societies, although extol primal values, will not seek to return to primal ways of life. Times have changed and we may look to primal times for only those resources that aid in fashioning an ecological paradigm suitable for emerging global societies.

These questions necessitate a probe into the ecological history of the archaic agrarian and pastoral societies and ancient urban civilizations -- the civilizations of Greece,

Palestine, the Arabian Desert, Northern India and China -- and the axial societies that succeeded them. As we said earlier, the scholars who have studied the axial revolution have not considered the dynamics that brought the pre-axial communities to the threshold of axial revolution. In our opinion, what preceded the axial age -- the widespread ecological crises -- are of utmost importance for understanding not only the essential negativity of the axial communities toward nature, but the entire history of the period. The limitations of this study restrain us from looking at all ancient civilizations and axial societies. We will focus on the Levant and the Fertile Crescent -- the cradle of Judeo-Christian tradition.

This then is the thesis to which we devote this dissertation. We submit that axial religions manifest an alienation of humans from nature, and that this alienation was due in large measure to social disruptions that were brought about by widespread environmental crisis. The alienation of humans from nature resulted in an aspiration on their part to an existence free from the pains and disillusionment of temporal existence. We pursue this line of inquiry by transposing the findings of scholars on axialism to green history. Three features of axial religions are to be illuminated in this way. These are, (1) the metaphysical formulations, (2) their human social experiences and (3), the actual encounter of humans with nature during pre-axial and axial times.

The title of the dissertation, "The Axial Negativity Toward Nature: Its Causes and consequences" expresses the burden of this thesis. It shows the aberrations of the anti-nature stance of axial thought and call us to re-enchant nature. The anti-nature stance of the axial religions continues to influence the contemporary culture and crisis. There is no

option but to give up old ways of thinking and living before it is too late.[27] John Cobb proposes Earthism as a way out of the present predicament. He was perhaps the first scholar to articulate the idea of Earthism and to claim to be an Earthist.[28] According to Cobb, Earthism alone can challenge the evils of economism, nationalism and Christianism that essentially disenchant nature altogether and alienate humans from nature. Earthism calls us to re-enchant nature without having to make a deity out of the planet earth. "The planet is not God."[29] Yet any religion that does not have commitment to the planet as one of its central concerns is not worthy of our support. The scheme of this dissertation, therefore, will seek to trace the process of the transition from oneness with nature to the growing disenchantment with nature from primal to axial times.

Our discussions will pursue this inquiry in the following chapters. Chapter 2 discusses the findings of scholars of religion who pointed to the soteriological and anti-nature motifs of the post-axial religious existence. This will provide us with a working profile of the anti-nature metaphysic that leads to "modernism," in which both religion and environment, according to David Griffin, are "disenchanted." Do these metaphysics point to an underlying human disillusionment with the world of nature that began to be manifested in the preaxial and axial age? Chapter 3 looks at the wider climatic changes and their effects on local biological niches. A great deal of the environmental change occurred at the core centers, before the axial age was engendered by orbital changes over which humans had no control. Ancient humans responded to these changes by exerting more pressure on their immediate environment.

Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 seek to identify religious and social anxieties engendered by the degradation of the bioregional niches and the concomitant cultural inputs derived from pre-axial existence and absorbed by the axial age. The root causes for human alienation derived from human experience of the world. The experiences of the human-world relations in the primal, archaic agrarian-and-herding, and urban societies that preceded the imperial societies within which the axial age emerged contributed to the form taken by the axial age and the religions that arose in it. Chapter 8 narrows the focus to the environmental dispositions, land and history of selected nations in the Levant and Eastern Mediterranean region. If Christianity borrowed its environmental stances from Jewish and Greek thought, we need to read the history of these nations in terms of the green history of these regions. Chapter 9 provides the conclusions for this dissertation in tracing the effects of the axial revolution on culture and society. The epilogue point toward the possibility of opting for Earthism -- the third major universal paradigm shift anticipated in the postmodern world. While the axial age paradigm shift disenchanted the world and religion, an Earthist form of the postmodern paradigm shift anticipates, according to Griffin, the reenchantment of religion and the environment.[30] The new paradigm shift raises the possibility of purging the dominant religious paradigms of their world–negating features that are now expressed in all the living world religions, Western or Eastern.

remove

Notes

Chapter 1

Axial Religions and the Human Negativity toward the Environment

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CHAPTER 2

Scholars' Views on Axial Traditions

Understanding axial thoughts demands observing this phenomenon from many different angles. Scholars who have studied this phenomenon have looked at it from their respective fields of expertise. Their works are of immense value to our study. Their findings provide a background for our pursuit. Our study attempts to observe the phenomenon from an angle that had not been used before. We are set to look at axial age from the perspective of religion and the environment. Nevertheless, we wish to narrow the angle further. When we study axial religions, our attention is drawn toward the "human negative disposition toward nature" that developed during that age. We are asking why and how this negative disposition came to be such an important aspect of the axial mentality. Could it have come about in large part because to the widespread environmental crisis that was in the offing during the pre-axial epochs?

We set out to answer this by looking at the changes in the human-world relations in response to the wider environmental changes that were taking place during primal, archaic and axial epochs. We do this from three angles. First, in this chapter we examine the thesis that the post-axial religions show alienation from nature. We demonstrate this by reviewing the perspectives of some scholars who have analyzed axial religions and cultures. The second angle is to look at axialism from the perspective of green history. This will be undertaken in the ensuing chapters. The third angle is to set our query in the context of the evolution of social and cultural forces and institutions that came to

characterize these epochs. These refer primarily to the escalation of violence, warfare and ignominious social institutions like patriarchy, slavery, hierarchy, monarchy and imperialism. Where these prompted by the failing environment?

As we stated in Chapter 1, religion reflects human experience of a given context. Religion is the only human enterprise that is capable of offering a comprehensive view and meaning on the human presence in the world. Religion comprehends the totality of human experience of the world as individuals and communities with all their hopes, fears and aspirations. It is like a map that offers a panoramic view of a given human situation and highlights human attitudes and dispositions toward the world of nature. Human dispositions toward nature correspond to human experience of the world. Religion is an index of the actual status of the human-world existence, and human-world relations provide an index to the actual status of the environment, especially at the seminal time when axial religions emerged and crystallized. When humans have pleasant and satisfying encounters with nature, these are reflected in positive religious valuations and formulations. Conversely, when these encounters have been unpleasant, they come to reflect negative valuations and formulations. Many of these unpleasant encounters with nature may also have been at the root of those social evils and institutions of oppressions that evolved during pre-axial and axial epochs. This and ensuing chapters will show that while mythical religions of primal peoples generally tend to radiate positive dispositions toward the world, axial religions are, by and large, negatively disposed to the world. We even see traces of this negativity in some archaic cults. Could this suggest that axial people confronted an unpleasant environment?

On the other hand, religion is not merely a reflection of the actual human experience of the world. It can also play a revisionistic role. At crucial times, religion becomes innovative and creative, and attempts to revise and transform human disposition toward life in general. Religion inspires and motivates, thrusting the human spirit into an adventure of ideas and action. Obviously, some adventures in religious ideas and actions are positive while others are negative. These differences reflect the actuality of human encounters with the world and with one another. By the same token, religions are also capable of inspiring new vistas on human welfare and happiness.

With these assumptions in mind, we read selected scholars on axialism. Most scholars who have looked at this phenomenon have evidently been students of religion and history. Although these scholars have not suspected an environmental crisis as one of the major causes for the rise of axialism, their observations of different aspects of axialism and what they failed to observe provide sufficient ground for us to pursue our thesis. It seems to us that these scholars were not aware that their works would lead in the direction we have perused. Their comments, whether they were from the perspective of history, religion, society or psychology, do point to a breakdown of human-world relations during axial age.

These scholars point out that axialism was one of the most important watersheds not only in the history of religion, but also in world history. Karl Jaspers claims,

> Man, as we know him today, came into being. For short we may style this the 'Axial Period' . . . . In this age were born the fundamental categories within which we still think today . . . . *Until today* mankind has lived by what happened during the Axial Period, by what was thought and created during that period [original emphasis].[1]

In the same vein, writes John Cobb,

> The cultures and religions to which this new existence gave rise are the axial cultures and religions, which still dominate the world. The axial men who embody this existence and participate in these cultures are *ourselves* [emphasis mine].[2]

John Hick says,

> [I]n this period all the major religious options, constituting the major possible ways of conceiving the ultimate, were identified and established and . . . nothing of comparably novel significance has happened in the religious life of humanity since.[3]

A casual reading of these statements would alert anyone to the potency of the axial dynamics for every sphere of human existence. These observations give us important clues to the significance of axialism not only for the study of the history of religions but also for green history.

That there was a major change in the nature of human thought and life in the middle part of the millennium before Christ, no scholar of religion would deny today. For Karl Jaspers, the axial age was a period when a great change was effected by the rise of what has been called the higher religions and philosophies. The term "axis," as used by Jaspers, refers to that on which things turn. Once the turn occurred, the world was no longer the same. What caused this turn is a question scholars have not answered satisfactorily, but they agree about the general tone and tenor of the axial thoughts and their manifestations in the post-axial religious and philosophical formulations.

Nevertheless, the notion of an axis of history has come to be widely accepted as a large-scale interpretive tool in the study of religion. This notion is employed to show the distinctions between pre-axial and the post-axial religions.[4] Beyond this, it seems, the

idea has had, so far, very little to contribute to the study of religion or to the study and pursuit of other spheres of human knowledge. Why has such an important stage in the advance of human religious thought not become the bedrock of every field of knowledge about humanity? John Hick believes that the "subject of the axial age, its causes, nature and consequences, is ripe for further research and clarification."[5] The axial age is yet to be fully exposed, interpreted and understood. The profound implication of this phenomenon for every field of human existence -- from economics to politics, from religion to ethics, from arts to sciences and technology -- are yet to be fully recognized and established. Such an in-depth and comprehensive analysis is yet to take place. We agree that a detailed and comprehensive picture of the axial revolution will not emerge until and unless it is set within a wider context -- a context that takes into consideration the environmental dynamics and especially the cooperation and confrontation of humans with nature during pre-axial and axial times.

For the purpose of this study, we have selected the works of five scholars. They are Karl Jaspers, The Origin and Goal of History (1949), Lewis Mumford, The Transformations of Man (1956), Robert N. Bellah, Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-traditional World (1970), John B. Cobb, Jr., The Structure of Christian Existence (1967) and John Hick, An Interpretation of Religion (1989).[6] In discussing these scholars and their works on axialism, we do not attempt to compare one with the other, nor do we offer any proposals for correction or revisions of their basic theses on the axial age. Since these five scholars observe the axial age from their field of expertise, we will merely confine ourselves to understanding their observations, although we will engage

John Cobb and John Hick in a dialogue. Our primary intent of course is to find out whether observations of these five scholars support our thesis -- the thesis that the axial religions emerged in large part due to the aberrations in human-world relations and the resulting social unrest and that the axial metaphysical and religious formulations were the schemes employed to resolve human predicaments in the human-world situations.

Before I proceed further, I need to acknowledge that I am indebted to John Cobb for the ideas and especially the terms I have borrowed from his work. I use "primal or primitive," "civilization," "archaic," and "ancient," with the same meaning with which Cobb has used them. Also Cobb's phrases "structures of existence," "crossing of threshold," and "modes of thoughts" are frequently used in this presentation. Although I do not discuss the meaning of these terms in detail, I wish to expand the context of these ideas. Cobb uses these terms for the actuality and the process occurring within the human psyche, showing that the essence of human cultural advance takes place within human consciousness and awareness, manifesting in the growth, development and concretization of the human psyche. Although we acknowledge that human cultural advances and transitions essentially take place within the human psyche, we emphasize the fact that the human psyche exists in relation to a body, which is related to and rooted in a natural world, so that the human psyche is shaped by the world. Therefore, any understanding of a human structure of existence requires a wider frame of reference -- a reference that views humans as constituted by human-world relations.

If we add this dimension to the conversations that Cobb has introduced, we will begin to see that the "structures of existence" or "crossing of thresholds" are directly affected

by human-world relations and that what goes on in the world out there affects the growth of human psyche and self-understanding. Therefore, if we were to talk about civilized existence in relation to primal existence, we would talk not only about the transition from mythical to reflective and rational awareness, which occurred within the human psyche, but also about how humans related and responded to the world in different ways during primal and civilized times. What we are attempting to underscore here is that the structure of human existence should come to encompass the whole gamut of human experience within a given context -- a context that is physical and biological as well as social and cultural. When we do this, the observations of these scholars are seen in a new light, since their findings are set in a wider context. It will then be possible to see if these scholars' observations on the change in human mentality through its course of advance give evidence of any changes occurring on the environmental and social fronts.

The reason for belaboring this point is this. We have an advantage over these scholars. Their works make it clear, that except for John Hick, they were not aware of the recent research in anthropology and green history. Besides, the environmental crisis as we know it today was not a live issue at the time when they wrote. In positing their theses, it appears, these scholars were invariably guided by the traditional notion that the people of the ancient world lived in harmony with nature and that nature on the whole was in good shape, able to sustain growing communities satisfactorily. If there were any social evils like violence, wars and slavery, these were due to the innate human proclivity for domination rather than human confrontation with nature. As will be shown in Chapter 3, this is far from the truth. This is one reason why these scholars, although

struck by the spurt of novel religious acumen during the axial age, were unable to pinpoint the actual cause for its rise. Chapter 3 and 4 will throw some light on how the land and landscape-gestalts play upon human awareness and shape the psyche. With these few introductory remarks, let us move to the consideration of these five scholars, starting with Karl Jaspers, who is credited with drawing the attention of the academic world to the axial phenomenon and naming it as such.

Karl Jaspers

For Karl Jaspers, the axial phenomenon served as a key that unlocked the scheme of history and a lens through which he viewed and interpreted human history. He writes,

> [The] axial period . . . seem[s] to throw a light upon the entire history of the world, in such a way as to reveal something like a structure of world history. . . . From it world history receives the only structure and unity that has endured at least until our own time.[7]

Jaspers sees the axial period as the great divide of history -- a divide that separates the pre-axial from post-axial, the ancient from the modern. Jaspers uses the term "axial" almost in a literal sense to connote the sharp tip over which the wheel of human history is delicately balanced. Once the wheel turned, history was never the same. Old things passed away and new things came into existence. He claimed that the axial age which he saw as limited to the six centuries between 800 and 200 B.C.E., decided the fate of human history from then to the present day. While the axial period brought several ancient civilizations that had survived for thousands of years, to an end,[8] it ushered in a new era, which continues into the present day. "*Until today [original emphasis],*" says

Jaspers, "mankind has lived by what happened during the Axial Period, by what was thought and created during that period."[9]

Although scholars of religion are in overall agreement with Jaspers' thesis, they point out that it needs expansion and revision in many directions.[10] One area where this revision should be made is to expand the actual span of the axial age proposed by Jaspers. In deciding the time span, Jaspers was guided by the rise of many individuals who made contributions to novel ideas and action in almost every field from science to arts and politics to religion. Scholars like John Cobb and John Hick see the need to expand the time frame far beyond the six centuries initially proposed by Jaspers, to include an epoch spanning over a millennium, beginning with the patriarchal cults of Israel and culminating in the rise of Islam in the Arabian peninsula. The second area where revision seems necessary is Jaspers' view of the axial period as having invaded human history suddenly. Jaspers sees the axial epoch occurring spontaneously on the scene without a precursor. Other scholars point out that the advent of axialism in fact had been prepared for and anticipated in the previous structures of human existence from archaic to the pre-axial epochs.[11]

Nevertheless, Jaspers' observation of the sudden rise of significant personalities -- philosophers, sages, and founders and prophets of religions almost simultaneously and independently in different centers around the world -- is something which scholars of religion have confirmed. Jaspers says, "The true situation was rather one of contemporaneous, side by side existence without contact."[12] To answer the question, "*What caused the facts of the Axial Period?*" Jaspers looks at many possible scenarios

from synchronistic parallelism to the rise of equestrian chivalry in ancient civilization to the migration of peoples, which could have made contacts and communication between different civilizations and cultures somewhat plausible. But no physical or historical facts available to him could adequately explain the simultaneous and spontaneous shift in human thoughts and the structure of religious existence. All that Jaspers could conclude was that the axial shift occurred in the human mind as a new mode of consciousness for which he finds no causal explanations.

> The mystery of the simultaneous inception of Axial Period appears to me to be situated at a much deeper level than the problem of the birth of the ancient civilizations. In the first place, the simultaneity is much more exact and, in the second, it relates to spiritual-historical developments in the whole conscious, thinking aspect of humanity.[13]

In this, Jaspers is very much in line with the thinking of others, including John Cobb, who explained the phenomenon in terms of transformation within human reflective and rational consciousness. Jaspers suggests that only a handful of individuals did the thinking while the masses followed them blindly.[14] These individuals were the prime movers of axial religion. What was unique about these movers was that they could think freely, independently, without social and traditional constraints. During primal and pre-axial epochs of human evolution, human awareness was dominated by mythical mentality -- a mindset that saw individual humans and societies as mere extensions of nature. The hold of the mythical consciousness restrained pre-axial humans from thinking freely and independently. Mythical consciousness could only inform humans as to the nature of the world processes to which they were inescapably bound. Axial light broke through the fetters of mythological consciousness and set humans free from seeing themselves as

mere extensions of nature. The axial thinker came to view himself as an independent entity, free from the limitations of the world and the society.

In terms of the radical shift observed in the religious thinking of axial people, Jaspers rightly shows that human rational capacities were used in ways that had not been employed before. There was indeed a profound adventure of ideas. Jaspers says, "In this age were born the fundamental categories within which we still think today."[15] "Consciousness became conscious of itself. Thinking became its own object."[16] Axial categories of thought transcended the actual experience of humans in relation to other humans as well as the experience of the world. It was rationality -- rationality of abstract symbolism and not mythology rooted in human experience of the world -- which came to guide the thought process of the axial thinker. Mythological awareness integrated humans with the world process. An axial person increasingly felt ill at ease living a life guided by mythologies symbolizing world processes, and rational thought came to assert its dominance over the mythical awareness. Thus, *logos* came to launch a fierce attack on *mythos.*[17] Why and how could the world processes lose their grip on the human consciousness?

Jaspers points out that the idea of One God emerged in the midst of the mythological pantheon. Deities and demons of the pantheons represented the forces and entities of nature, which until then were seen as those that controlled human affairs and destiny. Somewhere along the way, the pantheons lost their power, for they could not deliver what was expected of them. They had to be relegated to the background or discarded altogether in favor of the emerging One God. This One God was seen as the omnipotent

creator, sustainer and controller of the whole universe. Old myths which saw the divine, humans and world processes as bonded together gave way to myths which introduced dichotomies between the divine, humanity and the world.[18] This one supreme God now stood alone without cohorts independent of the world and human societies.

The emergence of this powerful supreme deity displacing trivial weak lesser gods caused the possibility of looking at divine reality with an ethical norm and ideal. Religion was rendered ethical, says Jaspers.[19] The ethical distinction of the emerging One God was not tied to any one entity of nature or world processes. Due to religion having come to acquire an ethical character, the locus of the ethical values could no longer be found residing in the world processes or in human societies or individuals. God alone was ethical and all others derived their ethical nature and character from this one ideal. Ethical values came to reside only in that One God, who was thought to be free from the decay that characterizes the world and human societies.

By virtue of the emergence of this one God, who alone is the locus of ethical norms, God had to transcend both the world and human communities. Thus, human societies and the world should become disenchanted in relation to this supreme deity. The supreme goal of human existence in this world should be sought in rejecting this disenchanted world and seeking union with this one ethical supreme God.[20]

What were the implications of these new ideas for axial humans? First was the notion that humans were entities apart from the world and the immediate environment that surrounded them. For the first time, it was possible for humans to see themselves as beings apart from nature. In the mythical world of primal and pre-axial periods, the

differentiation between humans and the nonhuman world were to a large extent nonexistent since all realities were seen enmeshed in each other. During the axial period, for the first time humans as individuals could stand apart and survey the world out there objectively. The axial human thought of himself or herself as a being -- a being with a unique identity and destiny. Jaspers writes, "What is new about this age, . . . is that man becomes conscious of Being as a whole, of himself and his limitations."[21] Since humans could look at themselves as independent of others and their environment, they were stimulated to create their own destiny. Jaspers suggests that this subject-object differentiation was without dualism and that humans of the axial world merely strove to transcend this distinction through self-liberation, redemption and in seeking union with the transcendent.[22]

A second important idea was that humans of the axial world were beginning to experience human limitations in relation to the overwhelming power and vengeance of the nonhuman world. The human being, according to Jaspers, experienced the terror of the world and his own powerlessness.[23] The question we beg: Why would axial human beings come to experience the overwhelming terror and vengeance of the world in contrast to the benevolence and providence of the world experienced by the primal human communities? Jaspers is at a loss to answer this.

Thirdly, a third important idea related to these two ideas emerges -- the idea of liberation and redemption. Increasingly, the world was seen to be hostile and ethically ambiguous. The only ethical reality to which humans could meaningfully relate was the emerging one of a supreme deity. All other entities were considered illusions, lacking

religious significance, meaning and eternal values. Jaspers says of the axial man, "He experiences absoluteness in the depths of selfhood and in the lucidity of transcendence . . . Face to face with the void he strives for liberation and redemption. By consciously recognizing his limits he sets himself the highest goals."[24] For the first time, the possibility for liberation and transcendence of the limitations came to the fore as humans strove for redemption. While finding an escape from these limitations, humans come to experience the depths of their selfhood and find the possibility for transcending the limitations of both the human body and the world of nature.

Fourthly, the dynamics of the axial change were played out more in the modes of human thought than in actions. But the very fact that this subject-object dualism emerged as a real possibility gave rise to seeing the reality in contradictions rather than in contrast. Since it was a mind game, all sorts of possibilities were explored and "[t]he most contradictory possibilities were essayed. . . . [T]he formation of parties and the division of spiritual realm into opposites . . . created unrest and movement to the very brink of spiritual chaos . . . . [T]he calm of polarities becomes the disquiet of opposites and antinomies."[25]

We ask: How could the axial mind think through such contradictory possibilities leading to the deconstruction of the unity and harmony of the pre-axial mythical world? Did these mental exercises reflect the actual human confrontation with the environment? Why did liberation and salvation become the human exigency of the axial age whereas permanence and continuity were the primary motives of the pre-axial communities? Why did the world come to be seen no longer as a place of human habitat, but as a perilous

place from which humans needed to escape? Does this suggest a growing rupture in the unity and harmony of the human-world relations and the world-acceptance of the mythical world?

Jaspers' findings of the axial period and its mentality raise some very interesting questions relevant to our study.

1. Why did axial people come to experience cosmic homelessness in the first place? Why did they have to repudiate the world and seek an escape from its realities and powers?
2. How did the world of nature and its processes, which held positive values of security and permanence for primal communities, now stand indigent, devoid of any ethical meaning or goodness?
3. Why and how did the gods of nature (whether male sky gods of the pastoral cults or the female earth goddesses of the agrarian cults) or the deified warlords of the cities fail to render religious or ethical meaning?
4. How could those philosophers and prophets emerge on the scene in the relatively brief span of a few centuries in different parts of the world? How could they all (without comparing notes) think through and articulate similar ideas of world rejection and seek liberation from the world of concrete realities and salvation beyond this world? Did societies in different parts of the world experience similar human predicaments?
5. In looking at the axial period, Jaspers was primarily fascinated by the rise of individual thinkers and the novelty of their ideas. His allusion to any external

influences, whether social, political or environmental, influencing religious thoughts was minimal. Although Jaspers looks at the axial phenomenon within a historical framework, he fails to see the larger context -- the context of the eco-socio-political realities of the pre-axial and axial epochs.

Secondly, although Jaspers observed and introduced the scholarly community to some of these intriguing scenarios, he did not rigorously pursue his thesis to its logical conclusions.[26] This may have been because Jaspers classified peoples, groups, and cultures and history in relation to axial societies with a certain bias. For one thing, Jaspers, like the anthropologists of his day, did not show much appreciation or knowledge of primal societies -- the hunting-gathering communities -- the longest lasting of all human cultures. Jaspers and others following him could not recognize why the axial revolution did not sweep the hunting-gathering communities. Jaspers brands them as primitive and characterizes them as people living "unhistorical life and as devoid of spiritual radiation."[27] Such a bias could have prevented not only Jaspers, but many others following Jaspers, from looking in the direction on which we are focused in this study -- that of identifying the axial negativity in the aberrations of human-world relations. It is within the panorama of the eco-social history that the axial revolution may come to make sense.

Lewis Mumford

In The Transformations of Man,[28] Lewis Mumford employs the term "axial" in two ways that differ from what Jaspers originally intended. First, whereas for Jaspers, the

axial period brought about a complete break with the past and ushered something altogether new and novel in the advance of human history, for Mumford the axial period constitutes a continuation of the past into the post-axial future. However, it did mark a turning point, since it changed the direction and course of human history. Secondly, the axial age profoundly transformed all human values and goals,[29] for it introduced the idea that human destiny is not limited to temporal and physical existence and experiences. Humans are endowed with the capacity to transcend all physical realities of time and space. Mumford writes,

> One of the most fundamental early contributions of the axial age was the notion that temporal events, touching finite beings, had an eternal significance: that the brief life of man does not end at death, but is continued in another sphere.[30]

While Jaspers as a historian traces the human advance in the rise and fall of civilizations and cultures, Lewis Mumford, being committed to an evolutionary model of life, traces human advance from animal existence into successive stages of cultural advance -- from archaic to civilized through axial to posthistoric human existence. Mumford sees human transformation as a play of the evolutionary advance of life. According to Mumford, what differentiates humans from animals is an abundance of unused energy not marked for nutrition, reproduction or defense. "In other animals excess vitality runs off mainly in muscular play. In man, it produces a constant undercurrent of sounds, images, exploratory actions."[31] In other words, humans surpass animals in the way they use their mental faculties and psychic energy to shape and orient their destinies. Evolutionary advance made it possible for many living organisms to transcend their past modes of existence and create something new and novel. For

humans, this evolutionary advance helped them transcend not only their animal past and but also the past epochs of their cultural existence. The axial dynamics facilitated the process of self-transformation and the emergence of human-selves that could transcend the limitations of the society, traditions and ultimately their own body. Mumford sees this process of self-transformation and transcendence as the essential working of the principle of the evolution of life.

> This impulse to self-transformation may be structured in the whole organic world; in fact, it may have its origins in the whole self-constituting cosmic process that built up the elements; . . . The process of self-transformation, finding wider scope in living organisms, resulted in one species after another, in a staggering diversity of forms, moving slowly upward toward mind, consciousness, widened opportunities for expression and self-direction. When the energy of this formative movement was exhausted, each species showed a tendency to level off at its own grade and remain there indefinitely, until either external pressure or some irresistible internal impulse resulted in a further transformation. This has its parallels in man's own self-transformation.[32]

According to Mumford, humans are different from animals in two respects. One is the capacity to dream and . . . transform the imagined projections into actual projects. The other is the sense of awe and veneration, . . . in the presence of forces that lie beyond the range of man's intelligence."[33] Mumford traces how these human capacities develop and play out in archaic, civilized, and axial communities and beyond.

Thus for Mumford, the primary achievement of the thinkers was not the emergence of the idea of one supreme deity, but rather the emergence of human-selves, after which the one supreme deity itself is ultimately modeled.

> The central change brought in by axial religion is the redefinition--in fact the recasting--of the human personality. In that act, values that emerge only in the personality replace those that belonged to institutions and institutional roles. The new feelings, emotional

> attachments, sentiments are now incarnated in a living image, that of the prophet. The life that he lives, the values he expresses, become a visible pattern for other men to follow. . . . The axial prophet both remakes the concept of God and remints the human image. *The personal takes precedence over the social* [emphasis mine].[34]

Every evolutionary advance, while acquiring something new and novel, also rejects and discards something of the past from which it emerged. The values of the past structures of existence seem trivial in the light of the newly acquired novelty. This process involved the creation of new human-selves, which could not only reject the ties to the animal past but also transcend both human body and society. The awareness that humans are unique and different not only from animals but also, as individuals, uniquely different from one another profoundly changed the understanding of axial humans about themselves. The awareness itself induced the transformation of personality in axial humans.

> The fact is that the axial transformation was not primarily an achievement of the conscious mind, still less a product of rational thought alone; it actually took place at far deeper levels and involved the whole personality.[35]

The transformation was possible only when axial humans could reject and move away from their animal past toward a new human destiny that transcended temporal and physical realities. Axial persons gradually gave up the worship of images modeled after animals and personifications of the forces and entities in nature. The axial prophet was harsh in his attack of any symbols that related humans to their animal past or to the biological world. No images made after any entity or force in nature is worthy of veneration and worship. Only the radical break of humans with the biological world may truly facilitate the sharpening and refinement of human-selves.

> [I]t is a self that is purified, as those conceived in the image of older deities were not, from too close attachment to man's animal nature. The ritual of the baptismal bath, threading through the axial religions, gives a symbolic emphasis to this inner cleansing . . . . [T]he prophet seeks to subdue every kind of animal craving and desire, to loosen all the bonds that tie him too closely to bare survival, to turn all organic and social activities into mere preparations for an existence of greater significance and beatitude. To live in the highest sense is to be released from the pressure to survive.[36]

Secondly, this human-self is seen as one that transcends every physical and biological limitation. The sensual demands of the human body for pleasure and comfort were devalued in favor of the cultivation and refinement of human-self. The axial prophet had attained this refined human-self and therefore presented himself as a model for others to emulate.

> This curbing of man's biological nature imposes a whole regimen of self-denial and bodily starvation: the eye must not be tempted by beautiful images . . . . In short, every sort of bodily activity must be repressed or starved; and above all, the sexual impulses. The ideal life for axial prophet . . . . is one released from sexual excitation and domestic responsibility: chaste, self-contained, subdued, conducted as far as possible away from the temptations that the mere presence of a member of the other sex may arouse. By all these means, the soul is to be quickened, and freed from the sordid cares and delusive pleasures that lower its powers.[37]

The emergence of human-selves brought about the dichotomy between body and soul. For the first time, humans came to understand themselves as those who contained within themselves another entity -- a soul, whose destiny was different from that of their bodies confined to the limits and decay of the temporal world.

Thirdly, since the axial human-selves were understood not to be restricted by the human body and social relations, all familial and communal ties are to be depreciated. The liberated human-selves of the axial person must reject family and society with all

institutions and traditions. Emancipation from all social and familial attachments became a virtue. These forces were seen as those that fettered human-selves during primal and pre-axial times. Liberation of the human-selves then entailed the rejection of all pre-axial social, political and familial institutions.

> The goods of civilization, too, are rejected or treated as threats to the soul's integrity . . . . [T]he obligations of the household become obstacles to self-perfection . . . . As far as possible this new self is detached, too, from the responsibilities of an organized community; its law, government, military obligations, economic operations, social duties, sacred rituals and symbols seem both hateful and harmful to the new self.[38]

Fourthly, since this emerging, new human-self denied values in concrete realities -- realities of the world, society, family, and human body -- it had to create its own new environment for self-expression and fulfillment. Therefore, axial prophets and their followers gave rise to the formation of a new kind of community -- a community that crossed over existing social and ethnic boundaries.

> From the beginning, the axial prophets sought to keep their vision high and pure by withdrawal from the political responsibilities and social complexities of their own community. Their method was to form a band of brotherhood, eventually to found a colony, of like-minded people, seeking in physical isolation to live wholly in accord with the precepts of the prophet.[39]

However, the growing new community made up of the prophet and his small band of followers could hardly effect an overhaul of the society at large. The new community took from the past only those that suited its communal life and values and rejected the rest. Over a period, when these communities grew large, they were forced to adopt and remodel their life styles -- after the very same institutions that they had rejected in the initial stages. The masses were called to follow the prophet not by coercion (exceptions

to this rule abound in every religion), but by the persuasion of the prophet's life of love and compassion.

> This image of a new man does not at first seek to impose itself by force or command; it relies upon the persuasiveness, or say rather the infectiousness, of the prophet's example.[40]

The society or the world no longer decides the fate of axial persons. Every individual is called upon to take personal responsibly for the choices she or he makes in relation to the new community. Thus the individual members of the axial sects increasingly came to exercise their volitional powers – volitional power that tapped into the rational faculties rather than the blind adherence to the dictums of the society or the instinctive response to the environment, as was the case in the pre-axial communities.

> With axial religion came a new challenge and a new possibility . . . [O]ne did not in their formative period, inherit the axial God or his prophet; one rather embraced them by a conscious act of choice, by an expression of faith that accompanied an effort at inner transformation. The new self was to be achieved, not primarily by indoctrination and habituation, though that would come later, but by conversion; an act of grace.[41]

Mumford concludes by pointing out the failure and illusions of axial prophets. According to him, axial religion did not go all the way and stopped short of complete transformation of human-selves and society. Although the prophets rebuked the evils of society and its powers, they were powerless to bring about major changes in the society as a whole and instead withdrew into the wilderness.[42] Secondly, by treating the soul alone, says Mumford, axial religion failed to do justice to man's whole nature; and its exaggerated expectations led to disappointment, frustration, and guilt.[43] The axial-self was stripped of its potentiality for relatedness to the world and to the larger human community.

> In its overemphasis of the cerebral and spiritual, the axial personality . . . is not, in its isolated perfection, a sufficiently representative ideal of human potentiality, for it rejects too much that is needed for full human growth. Moreover the inner life, which became the exclusive center of axial attention, is not self-sufficient; and the morality that holds together in isolation may crumble when submitted to social pressure.[44]

We can briefly summarize the relevance of Mumford's observations to our study and raise further questions.

1. Mumford observes widespread social unrest during the axial period. He points to this fact from his observation of the religious stirring of the axial age. Mumford does not delve deeply into the type of religious modeling the axial age brought forth or its relationship to the social unrest he observes. Sociology of religion informs us that new cults, religions and movements emerge at a time of acute social unrest and disintegration. The rise of new cults during the axial age suggests that there was something amiss in the workings of the pre-axial cults, so that they failed to correspond to the actual human experience as well as to provide the meaning of human experience. Pre-axial cults essentially sustained the social agenda of the agrarian, pastoral and early urban-imperial communities. These corresponded closely to the human-world structures of existence and experience of pre-axial societies. They were now beginning to breakdown and were unable to prevent the growing social unrest. The widespread emergence of axial cults may be a pointer to the inability of the pre-axial cults, rooted in their environmental niche, to prevent the social catastrophe in centers where the axial revolution was taking place. Writing on the demise of ancient civilizations, Mumford observes that they collapsed under their own burdens.[45] Although the plausibility of the failure of human-world relations to sustain these ancient civilizations did not occur to him, the very fact

that he alludes to the widespread social unrest of the axial period is an indication that something larger must have been in the offing, triggering social unrest and disintegration during pre-axial and axial periods.

2. Although Mumford observes widespread social unrest during the axial age, he does not go on to probe why axial societies managed to survive and advance, while the well established archaic civilizations collapsed under their own weight and vanished completely. Indeed violence and wars were widespread in the Fertile Crescent and Levant regions during pre-axial times. But the total disintegration of societies and their cultures were confined to few desert regions at the core centers.

3. Why did the axial humans, as Mumford states, reject and deny their animal past? Were axial humans at war with nature, with all its flora and fauna?

4. Why did the axial prophet retreat to the wilderness? If, as we claim, the health of the environment deteriorated significantly, causing widespread social unrest, would not the wilderness be the last place to which one would withdraw to seek solace, comfort and inspiration? Paul Shepard says that the World civilizations rose and vanished in the desert of the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn and most of the concepts that underlie Western civilization and especially the theme of rejection of habitat were born in the desert.[46] If this is true, what sort of wilderness did the axial prophet seek out into which to withdraw? Did the prophets merely withdraw from a world with humans to a world without them, or did they withdraw to an environment like the desert that exuded unchanging permanence and constancy as opposed to the agrarian, pastoral and urban ethos that constantly changed and decayed with every season?

5. Mumford subscribes to the evolutionary theory of life to explain human advance and the crossing from one threshold to the other. For him, evolution is a process of increasing differentiation and complexity of organization that endows organisms and social systems with greater ability to adapt to the environment, so that organisms and societies are more autonomous relative to their environment than were their less complex ancestors. Every evolutionary leap brings about novel and more complex forms of organisms and structures. If the axial human personality was stripped of its rich potentialities for relatedness, how could Mumford claim that the emergence and refinement of the axial self was an evolutionary gain? In what ways was the refined and chaste axial personality richer than the pre-axial one? Or were the changes made by the axial human-self a regression in human culture and history? These are issues and questions that deserve satisfactory explanations. But for the time being, we leave these aside and turn to our next scholar on axialism, Robert Bellah.

Robert Bellah

In Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-traditional World,[47] Robert N. Bellah tenders a sociological analysis of religion. For Bellah, the key that unlocks and interprets the history of religions is the notion of "world acceptance" and "world rejection." It is a notion he borrows from Max Weber's thesis presented in the article entitled "Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions."[48] Bellah points out that all religions can be appraised in terms of the criteria of world acceptance or world rejection. He writes,

> I want to concentrate on the fact that they were all in some sense rejections, and that world rejection is characteristic of a long and important period of religious history. I want to insist on this fact because I want to contrast it with an equally striking fact, namely the virtual absence of world rejection in primitive religions, in religion prior to the first millennium B.C. and in the modern world.[49]

Accordingly, Bellah observes the first millennium B.C.E. and sees religious symbols that reflect ultimate concerns of human existence undergoing drastic change -- a change that manifests extreme negativity toward both humans and the world.

> The first of these facts is the emergence in the first millennium B.C. all across the Old World, at least in centers of high culture, of the phenomenon of religious rejection of the world characterized by an extremely negative evaluation of man and society and the exaltation of another realm of reality as alone true and infinitely valuable.[50]

Interestingly though, Bellah does not refer to Karl Jaspers or employ axial terminology. However, like most scholars who observed the axial age as a stage on the advance of evolutionary history, Bellah subscribes to the evolutionary frame of reference with regard to seeing religion as constituted by symbol systems. Bellah writes,

> The central focus of religious evolution is the religious symbol system itself. Here the main line of development is from compact to differentiated symbolism, that is, from a situation in which world, self, and society are seen to involve the immediate expression of occult powers to one in which the exercise of religious influence is seen to be more direct and rational . . . . The more differentiated symbol systems make a greater demand on the individual for decision and commitment.[51]

With this understanding, Bellah defines religion as a set of symbolic forms and acts that relate man to the ultimate conditions of his existence.[52] The set of symbolic forms, according to Bellah, revolves around and resolves how humans of every generation relate to a given world. For Bellah, then, understanding the history of religion is a matter of classifying, categorizing and comparing every religion for its disposition for world

acceptance or world rejection. Could Bellah's observation then suggest that the world acceptance or world rejection manifested by every religious formulation corresponds to the actual experience of humans of the world around them and the status of human-world relations as they existed during the seminal period of their formulations? We wish Bellah would have pushed the argument in this direction.

Bellah proceeds to analyze the religions of successive human societies -- primitive, archaic, historic, early modern, and modern societies. Drawing from the works of Levy-Bruhl and E. H. Stanner, Bellah looks at the Australian aborigines as a model to understand primal societies. Focusing on understanding the symbol systems that constitute the worldviews of primal communities, Bellah says,

> Primitive religions are on the whole oriented to a single cosmos. . . . They are concerned with the maintenance of personal, social, and cosmic harmony and with attaining specific goods--rain, harvest, children, health--as men have always been. . . . [T]he overriding goal of salvation that dominates the world rejecting religions is almost absent in primitive religion.[53]

World-acceptance is a foundational characteristic of primal religious existence. It necessitates a disposition that is spontaneous, responsive and fluid rather than reflective and detached. The only mode of mental disposition that could successfully live with world-acceptance, as we know from the history of religions, has been mythical consciousness. Mythical consciousness is essentially a response to, rather than a reflection on, the experience of the world. Bellah adds,

> Not only is every clan and local group defined in terms of the ancestral progenitors and the mythical events of settlement, but virtually every mountain, rock, and tree is explained in terms of the actions of mythical beings. . . . Primitive *religious action* is characterized not, . . . by worship, but by identification, participation, acting out. . . . At the primitive level

> *religious organization* as a separate social structure does not exist. Church and society are one [original emphasis].[54]

The world-acceptance of the mythical mentality is essentially monistic. The monistic disposition pursues lasting human-world relations.

Bellah terms the next stage of the evolutionary history of religion "archaic." Here Bellah looks at the religions of Africa, Polynesia and some of the New World, as well as the ancient Middle East, India and China. Archaic Religion is characterized by the emergence of precise cults -- cults with a systematized set of gods and goddesses, priests, worship, sacrifice, and in some cases divine or priestly kingship.[55] Like the mythical world of the primal religions, the basic worldview is still monistic. But hierarchy and differentiation come to define the cosmology in which divine, humans and the world have their own unique niches.[56] Although there was hierarchy within the perceived cosmology, there was no dichotomy of one entity from the other. All entities were interconnected and each depended on the other.

Although Bellah claims that there was a great deal of world-acceptance in archaic societies, the very fact that the egalitarianism of the primitive world-acceptance was gradually usurped by a hierarchical and much more differentiated form of world-acceptance indicates that humans of the archaic times were able to distinguish and classify their experience of the world and society in relative terms with the attribution of positive and negative values. It also indicates that not all human experiences of the world were viewed with positive valuation. This seems to indicate that not all was well with the human-world relations as it existed during this archaic epoch. The archaic epoch was a time when human communities by and large lived by agrarian and pastoral occupations.

This was also an epoch when urban centers emerged and flourished, mainly sustained by the agrarian economy. The human penchant for domination and larceny led to organized warfare. Human aggression had a profound impact on human communities and the environment the world over.

As will be shown in the next chapters, in archaic times human communities came to experience scarcity, starvation, famine and epidemics. These were largely the result of population pressure, wars and environmental devastation caused both by emerging human societies and the planetary changes in the weather patterns leading to the advance of deserts and desiccation. But on the whole, the world-accepting categories of the primal communities carried into the archaic religions prevented archaic communities from disintegrating.[57]

The next stage of development, according to Bellah, is the coming into existence of historic religions, what Karl Jaspers and his followers refer to as axial religions. Almost all living world religions have their roots in the historic religions of the axial age. Jaspers was excited at the emergence of axial prophets and their novel ideas and gave axialism a positive valuation. For Bellah, the axial age does not hold such excitement. Rather, Bellah views the axial age somewhat grimly and states that the central characteristic of the historic religions is world-rejection. The essence of the world-rejection was manifested in their transcendentalism, dualism, and ideas of salvation (enlightenment, release, etc).[58]

> [T]he historic religions promise man for the first time that he can understand the fundamental structure of reality and through salvation participate actively in it. . . . Perhaps partly because of the profound risks

> involved, the ideal of the religious life in the historic religions tends to be one of separation from the world.[59]

Hierarchy, detachment and dualism came to decide every aspect of human existence and relations, whether in the religious sphere or the socio-political sphere. World-rejecting values devalued peoples, groups, and occupations that had close contact with nature. Such a hierarchy within organized religions brought about the emergence of differentiated collectives, one secular and political, the other, religious. Both of these collectives were organized in hierarchical order. Together with the notion of a transcendent realm beyond the natural cosmos comes a new religious elite that claims direct relation to the transmundane world.[60] Bellah writes,

> The distinction between religious and political elites applies to some extent to the two great lower strata. From the point of view of the historic religions the peasantry long remained relatively intractable and were often considered *religiously second-class citizens, their predilection for cosmological symbolization rendering them always to some degree religiously suspect.* The notion of the peasant as truly religious is a fairly modern idea. On the contrary it was the townsman who was much more likely to be numbered among the devout, and Max Weber has pointed out the great fecundity of the urban middle strata in religious innovations through the several great historical traditions [emphasis mine].[61]

Bellah's observation raises a germane question for our study here. During archaic times, the primary depository of religious acumen was with the peasantry -- the pastoral and agrarian communities. These archaic societies were the originators of cults endowed copiously with representations of the ultimate in images and myths. Historic traditions were penurious of these vivid concrete representations and symbols of the ultimate. Historic traditions in fact borrowed the concepts behind the archaic images and myths and recast them, bereft of their concrete representations. How and why did the peasantry

of the archaic times come to be stripped of the potency for religious acumen and rendered religiously suspect during axial and post-axial times? Was it because their occupations kept them in close contact with the animal and biological world, which were riddled with failures, uncertainties and perils? Was it a wholesale aversion to anything that had to do with the soil and with animals?

Secondly, according to Bellah, primitive religious existence symbolically integrated human presence within the world. During the archaic epoch, pastoral cults with their transcendent male high gods, the agricultural cults with their immanent fertility goddesses, and the warlords representing the divine at the urban centers provided the essential unifying religious paradigms. But these two epochs, primal and archaic, were characterized by world-accepting modes of religious existence. During the historic religious phase, the locus of divine actuality was removed from this world to a world beyond. Thus this world of concrete reality came to be rendered secular. The ground for divinity no longer resided within the peasant or pastoral world. Divinity was transferred to a secular man-king or to a transcendent reality. Thus the world of concrete reality could no longer hold religious or ethical values and therefore world-rejection came to be the foundational tenet of historic religions.

Thirdly, Bellah's observations of the world-accepting disposition of Early Modern and Modern Religions deserve some comments here. By Early Modern Religion, Bellah refers to the Reformation times and the new attitude of world-acceptance that he believes it ushered in. Bellah writes,

> The defining characteristic of early Modern Religion is the collapse of the hierarchical structuring of both this and the other world. . . . Under

> the new circumstances salvation is not to be found in any kind of withdrawal from the world but in the midst of worldly activities. . . . [B]y proclaiming the world as the theater of God's glory and the place wherein to fulfill his command, the Reformation reinforced positive autonomous action in the world instead of a relatively passive acceptance of it. . . .With the acceptance of the world not as it is but as a valid arena in which to work out the divine command, . . . the Reformation made it possible to turn away from world rejection in a way not possible in the historic religions.[62]

Although the Reformation did not go all the way in accepting the world, it turned partly away from the world-negating disposition of the historic religions while essentially continuing to employ the world-rejecting categories and symbol systems of the historic religions. On the other hand, Bellah goes on to say that the Modern Religion (with Immanuel Kant as the primary figure), which follows the Early Modern Religion, makes a fundamental break with traditional historic symbolization.[63] The entire modern religious outlook forces us to ground religion in the structure of the human situation itself.[64] Bellah says,

> In the worldview that has emerged from the tremendous intellectual advances of the last two centuries there is simply no room for a hierarchic dualistic religious symbol system of the classical historic type. This is not to be interpreted as a return to primitive monism; it is not that a single world has replaced a double one but that an infinitely multiplex one has replaced the simple duplex structure. It is not that life has become again a "one possibility thing" but that it has become an infinite possibility thing.[65]

Bellah's view on the world-accepting disposition of Modern religions seems to point toward some similarities in the ecological disposition we witness at the dawn of post-modern era. We will discuss Bellah's observation of world-acceptance in the modern era in our concluding chapter.

John B. Cobb, Jr.

Now we turn to a scholar who not only looked at the axial revolution, as did others, but went a step further in searching for the causes of its occurrence. John B. Cobb, Jr. is a process theologian whose interests and expertise are not limited to theology as normally understood. Among his many books, The Structure of Christian Existence deals with axialism at length.

Cobb's intention in writing The Structure of Christian Existence was not to study the axial period *per se,* but a major portion of the book is devoted to it and the variations occurring within axial religious traditions. The purpose of the book was to show why Christianity might make a legitimate claim to our allegiance. He writes in the preface, "This book is an inquiry into what is distinctive in Christianity and into its claim to finality."[66] Such a claim to uniqueness and finality cannot be made lightly. Before one makes such a claim to finality, one should have itemized, compared, contrasted and evaluated the relative merits of all dogmas, practices and histories of every religion on the face of the earth. But in reality this is impracticable. Cobb says, "[T]he study of comparative doctrine will not take us far."[67]

To simplify the task ahead, Cobb works out a strategy -- a strategy that would aid in testing the relative merits of every tradition that claims human allegiance. Cobb does this by introducing and defining a conceptual category which he terms structure of existence and employing it as a touchstone for analyzing a few past and some living world religions. Cobb says, "It is my conviction that Christianity brought into being a structure of existence different from those of Judaism and of Greek humanism as well as from that

of such Eastern religions as Buddhism."[68] The book therefore attempts to identify and appraise that structure of existence, which came into being in and with Christianity.[69] Cobb believes that it is at the level of structures of existence that a meaningful comparison of major religions can be made. He believes that

> [t]he major religions and cultures of mankind embody different structures of existence, and that this is the deepest and most illuminating way to view their differences. If this is correct, then the distinctive essence of Christianity can best be seen in terms of the structure of Christian existence, and it can best be compared with other claimants for our allegiance at this level.[70]

Cobb imparts a new twist -- a psychic twist -- to the meaning of the term existence. In the evolutionary scheme of understanding, the term existence would come to mean the continuity and discontinuity of humans with their animal past as well as providing the basis for observing and explicating changes and transformations that take place within the human psyche as humanity crosses the threshold from one culture to another. Human advance entails transformation on several fronts of human existence – physiological, mental and cultural. One front where this transformation has been quite noticeable is in the growth and crystallization of the human psyche, constituted by unconscious and conscious dimensions and by rational, emotional, and volitional features. The transformation in the structure of existence occurs essentially in the psyche. Cultural anthropology informs us that the human psyche has had the most incremental advance during the epoch when humans crossed the threshold from primal existence through civilized existence culminating in axial existence.

Cobb says that that which distinguishes humans from their simian ancestors is not manifested so much in the physiological development as in the psychic make up.

> [I]t can be assumed that after biological evolution had long ceased to have importance, new structures of existence continued to develop in man. . . . [Humans possess sufficient] surplus psychic energy . . . to enable the psychic life to become its own end rather than primarily a means to the survival and health of the body.[71]

In the evolutionary scheme of human advance, this was when the great divide between the humans and the animals occurred.[72]

The human psyche plays a crucial role throughout humans' advance, allowing them not only to respond to the environment but also to distance themselves from the world and to control and orient human destiny. The human psyche, as it evolves, refines and defines itself, seeks more autonomy and its own satisfaction rather than primarily being of service to the body or aiding humans to adapt to the changing environment. Cobb writes,

> [T]he human psyche also seeks its own satisfaction in ways that have nothing to do with the functional needs of the body and even in ways that are detrimental to the body. . . . [T]he guiding principle . . . was not practical usefulness in the adaptation to the environment, but intrinsic satisfaction.[73]

How could the psyche become a unique entity and emerge as the most decisive force controlling the destinies of individuals and societies? According to Cobb, what is distinctive of the human psyche is symbolization.

> This whole process of psychic activity is one of symbolization. Symbols, unlike signals, have their meaning independently of the presence or absence of what is symbolized. They connote ideas, concepts, and one another rather than simply denoting some other entity. The process of symbolization is one of giving new material its place in relation to the old. . . . With the growth of symbolization, practically the whole of conscious experience was symbolically organized.[74]

Symbolic activity when culturally conditioned and socially controlled leads to habits of thought. The human mind is then programmed to think only in a given form. Over a period of time, habits of thought obstruct growth and development and prevent changes from taking place. It is difficult to transgress and transcend entrenched habits of thoughts. Ultimately habits of thought come to have such a hold on human behavior and destiny that the symbolic activity of the psyche works against the very survival of humanity. Confirming this, Cobb says, "Because of their symbol systems, men have, at times, failed to respond to novel challenges and have preferred, instead, simply to be destroyed."[75] Could this explain why ancient civilizations, in spite of the tremendous advances they made, vanished from the scene?

In Cobb's scheme of human evolutionary-historical advance, there are two major threshold crossings. The first is the evolution of *Homo sapiens* from the animal past. This threshold crossing brought humans into primitive existence. The structure of existence that characterizes the primitive existence of humans is mythical existence. Mythical existence is based largely on unconscious activity of the psyche. Cobb writes,

> By mythical existence I mean, . . . an existence that satisfies two conditions. First, reflective consciousness supersedes receptive awareness and the organization of experience in terms of signals. Second, the symbolization involved is governed by modes of creation and association characteristic of the unconscious and not subject to testing against receptive awareness . . . .
> Mythical thinking is not to be thought of primarily as an attempt to explain the external world, for such a concept presupposes consciousness of the duality of subject and object, internal and external, which is not characteristic of the mythical mentality . . . .
>
> There was little distinction of inner and outer, subject and object; little distinction between those elements of the experience contributed by the more remote past and those contributed by present occurrences. There was a single meaningful whole. The meaning of the whole was

> primarily determined by symbols arising out of the unconscious aspects of experience. There was no second-level critical reflection about these meanings. Hence, they were absolute.[76]

By and large, humans the world over were given over to mythical existence up until the dawn of the axial age. Cobb's concept of primitive existence distinguishes humans from non-human animal existence. Animal existence may be characterized as one lived purely by an intelligent, yet unconscious, awareness of and response to signals. In contrast, the symbolic activity of the psyche gives rise to a mythical mentality by which primal human communities were able relate to one another and to the environment spontaneously. The second major threshold crossing by humans occurred when primitive existence gave way to axial existence. The structure of existence that characterizes axial existence was rational consciousness. This was prepared for by the increasing role of rational thought in ancient civilizations. Cobb writes,

> [B]y the axial period the shift of the seat of existence to the reflective consciousness was occurring in influential segments of the community. This led to the progressive rationalizing of reflective consciousness, as well as to its strengthening. Finally, rational consciousness was prepared to assert its full autonomy from, and its power over, the mythical symbolization by which ancient civilization had lived. The power of mythical thinking was broken, and a new structure of existence emerged.[77]

The crossing of the threshold from mythical to axial existence brought about a radical paradigm shift -- a shift that totally jolted and transformed old modes of thought and living and values. Although axial thought was in continuity with what had gone before, it introduced possibilities for human experience that had never existed before.

The axial revolution was expressed in the rise of several new religions. What is interesting is not the volume, but the immense variations among them, although all of these share in axial circumstances. Cobb writes,

> I have been speaking as if primitive man, civilized man, and axial man each constituted a single type, recognizing that they shaded off into each other; but we must also recognize that the variations among groups and individuals belonging to each are very great. Yet in the case of the first two, for our purposes, these varieties could be neglected. When we turn to axial man, the situation changes. Here the possible range of diversity is still greater, and some consideration of this diversity is essential to the understanding of our own situation and Christianity.[78]

We are not so much concerned in this dissertation with these axial variations. Our concern is to answer the question of why the axial revolution occurred at all. If it ushered in variations in the axial structures of existence within a relatively short span of a few centuries, why did such variations not occur during the mythical epoch, given its longevity? In comparing and contrasting mythical and axial existence, Cobb notes that the variations occurring in societies living by mythical existence were negligible in comparison to axial existence, which brought forth major varieties of religious existence. True, mythical existence was generally uniform the world over and did not generate a great deal of novelty. Nevertheless, the color and richness of its cults and the capacity to encompass and make religious meaning of the whole gamut of human life and experience has no parallel in any other modes of human existence. This mythical mentality allowed human life to last for nearly two million years on this planet. In relating humanity to the world, mythical existence was truly responsive and spontaneous. The categories of its symbolization reflected some of the endless variations in nature. The axial

symbolization, although controlled, rational and intense, was abstract and bereft of concrete cultic exercises that related humans to the surrounding world. Thus, the axial psyche and thought forms could emerge and crystallize only in a context when humans withdrew from the concrete realities of the eco-social world and sought meaning in their inner lives.

Mythical existence was the dominant structure of human existence for millennia. A major portion of the human presence on earth was lived by mythical existence – by far the longest lasting of all structures of human existence. The dominant occupation of humans during most of these millennia was hunting and gathering food for survival. We now know that this epoch of human existence sustained human communities for generations with health and abundance and with the least impact on the environment. This raises the question, why did the mythical age last so long, whereas the axial age about which Karl Jaspers was excited has less than three millennia to its credit and has already shown signs of disintegration and breakdown? It must be recognized that mythical existence had its positive values in terms of sustaining the health of the environment as well as that of human beings. Unlike the axial mentality's penchant for transcendence, the mythical mentality's values are to be found in its capacity to aid human communities to accept given situations and integrate human life within social and biological limits.

We understand why Cobb presented the axial mentality with positive valuation in comparison to the mythical mentality. When Cobb authored The Structure of Christian Existence in 1967, he was not aware of the recent findings of studies on primal hunting

and gathering communities. Writing in the preface to the University Press of America edition of the book in 1990, Cobb writes,

> I still believe that something was gained through the transitions described, but I am now emotionally aware of the enormous price that has been paid and the greatness of what was sacrificed. I have been compelled, especially by Paul Shepard, to a deep appreciation of primal existence and to the recognition that I failed abysmally to do justice to this longest-lasting of all forms of human existence. The image of the fall now seems profoundly pertinent to the account of the shift from that existence to the archaic one, and "civilized" no longer functions for me as a term laden with positive valuation.[79]

Thirdly, although Karl Jaspers observed a radical paradigm shift from primal to axial existence, Cobb, along with others, sees a gradual threshold-crossing with intermediate stages. Cobb calls the intermediate stage of threshold crossing between primal and axial epochs "Civilized Existence." Although Cobb recognizes the important distinctions between primitive and archaic cultures, he does not give much credence to the difference existing between them and groups them together. From our perspective, both archaic and civilized existences are very crucial stages of human development. The seeds of the axial shift were sown during these epochs. The fundamental shift in human-world relations that proved to be destructive to the health of both humans and the environment occurred during this epoch. In terms of changes in human-world relations, the most important shift occurred during this epoch. As Cobb recognizes, there is much overlapping between these stages of human development, and the residues of previous cultures continue to persist in every succeeding culture.

However, some demarcations would be necessary for us to make this study more focused. Contemporary scholars think that *Homo erectus* was the first hominid to

emigrate from Africa, some 1.8 million years ago, spreading all the way to China and Indonesia. There are at least two major schools of thought on human evolution. Among these, only one school refers to our species as *Homo sapiens sapiens*. According to this school, our species, *Homo sapiens sapiens* and our cousins – the Neanderthals -- evolved from *Homo erectus* not more than 100,000 years ago. Both species inhabited the same general turf in many parts of Europe and Middle East for thousands of years. For some unknown reasons, the Neanderthals disappeared leaving only our species of the hominid.[80] By about 30,000 years ago, *Homo sapiens sapiens* had spread across and inhabited all nooks and corners of the planet except for regions of yearlong snow and ice, the highest mountain ranges and a few remote islands. Humans thus came to adapt to every possible environment in the world from the deserts of Africa to the Arctic regions of the North.[81] During this long epoch of migration and global inhabitation, humans survived by hunting and gathering. Hunting-and-gathering was the universal strategy of food-procurement for a large part of human history. The mythical age lasted for millennia -- from the emergence of *Homo sapiens sapiens* until about 12,000 B.C.E., when humans began to adopt agricultural and pastoral ways of life.[82] Richard Leakey says, "Given the importance of hunting-and-gathering through the many thousands of generations of our forebears, it may well be that this way of life is an indelible part of what makes us human."[83] This period should be seen as humans-in-nature. Humans were on the receiving end not only biologically, but also psychically according to Cobb. The psychical disposition was one of total participation in the process of nature -- participation by reception and reflection without the scourge of the subject-object duality

of the post-axial traditions.[84] The worldview of mythical existence to a large extent was informed and shaped by a rich mix of landscape-gestalts -- gestalts constituted by a variety of alpine, arboreal, savanna and riverine topophilia with numerous flora and fauna.

The second stage of human advance is from around 12,000 years ago, when a significant number of human communities began the slow transition from being food gatherers to food producers. Around this period, some humans gradually made the transition to pastoral and agricultural occupations alongside the earlier occupation of hunting and gathering. By the time the axial age arrived, much of humanity had made the transition to agricultural and pastoral occupations. Ancient urban civilizations appeared from around 5000 B.C.E. Cobb rightly notes the great contributions these urban civilizations made to art, literature, science and government. He therefore calls this "Civilized existence," downplaying the impact of the archaic epoch. But it should be noted that these urban centers were by no means self-sufficient. They depended largely on the surrounding agrarian and pastoral economies. The dominant human-world relation that characterizes this epoch was one of humans over nature. The emergence of agrarian, pastoral and urban cultures of the ancient world unleashed a humanly-caused ecological crisis all over the world, especially around the major centers of ancient civilization. As C. Dean Freudenberger states, "[A]griculture . . . is the most environmentally abusive activity perpetrated by the human species."[85] Although the crisis was confined to the local centers, it began the steady process of deforestation and desertification. The demise

of ancient civilizations can be also traced, among other factors, to the environmental abuses spread by agrarian and pastoral occupations of the ancient world.

After surviving for several millennia, mythical existence began to lose its hold on human communities as civilized existence expanded. But mythical existence did not vanish completely. Mythical mindset continued to impact civilized and axial societies. Mythical thinking has its share even in contemporary scientific and technological societies. Like archaic and axial societies, moderns are not completely free from mythical worldviews. Some measure of mythical thinking and living is necessary to maintain a saner life on this world. We will have more to say on the role of myths and mythical existence throughout this study. Suffice to say here that every threshold crossings is marked by societies discarding obsolete mythical worldviews in exchange for new ones that reflect the changed situations.

Pastoral, agricultural and urban cultures require a great deal of rational reflection, specialization of human skills and vocation and manipulation of the environment. These occupations by their very nature do not accept a given situation. Rather they seek to change, overcome and dominate obstacles encountered in nature and society. For this to have occurred, a great deal of reflection of the conscious awareness must have come into play. But as Cobb notes, early agricultural, pastoral and urban communities by and large continued to make meaning through mythical categories.[86] The structure of the psyche was centered on mythified rationality -- a receptive and reflective rationality that continued to derive meaning from the categories of the preceding pure mythical existence.[87] The mythical meaning imposed on the reflective consciousness of the

archaic and civilized humans increasingly came to be at odds with the actual human experiences on the environmental front due to the widespread ecological devastation caused by agricultural and pastoral occupations. The grip of the mythical world on human destiny lost its power, not only because of the emerging reflective rationality, but also due to the contradiction in the mythical meaning in relation to actual human experience of the world. Axial thought expressed the negativity of the human experience on the social and ecological front. Paleo-mythical communities (primal communities) were more at ease in the world. The neo-mythical communities (early pastoral, agricultural and ancient urban communities), although not consciously at war with the environment, nevertheless increasingly came to be at odds with the environment. Their mythical consciousness, which had sustained them for thousands of years, now began to show cracks and contradiction.

The third stage is the axial age -- a stage when humans were at war with nature. The spread of imperialism provided the background for the axial age. The human-world disposition of this age was one of humans vs. nature. Although the landscape gestalts derived were from urban, savanna and riverine ethos, the axial mentality transposed these gestalts into ethereal categories and meanings. This was when humans felt alienated from the world. In one sense, to be sure, axial humans were very rational and their rationality defeated the mythical consciousness. But it was also a rationality that distanced humans from the concrete world of nature. It brought in a duality that became a threat to the very survival of humans and the world of nature. For the first time, humans felt homeless in this world. As Cobb says, "There were many individuals who

came to be increasingly at home in this world of rational consciousness and increasingly estranged from the mythical world that still controlled their situation."[88]

In the concluding chapters, Cobb discusses yet another level of existence -- spiritual existence -- that was an important hallmark of many axial traditions. Cobb sees spiritual existence as being in continuity with the evolution of human psyche from pre-axial times. Nevertheless, spiritual existence was a great leap forward as witnessed in the primitive church. Life in the Spirit as recorded in the New Testament was unique and markedly different from the prophetic existence characteristic of Judaism from which it emerged. Cobb identifies the Spirit as the self-transcending self.[89] This transcendent self experienced and propagated by the primitive church has become the cornerstone for many strands of spirituality within Christian tradition.

The uniqueness of Christian existence, in comparison to its predecessors and contemporaries, was seen on several fronts. First, this new spirituality did not revert to the pre-axial modes of the Spirit's actions in a person's life. An archaic person, who came under the influence of the Spirit, often lost control of his or her conscious center and was subject to the power of the unconscious existence. Earlier modes and expressions of the Spirit, whether in shamanic or archaic agrarian and pastoral traditions, subjected the individual to paranormal human behavior. Those humans were at the mercy of the Spirits that invaded their psyche. Some of these influences turned out to be vile and harmful to the individuals concerned. In the new experience of Spirit in the primitive church individuals did not lose their conscious center. Their identity, personality and rationality were left intact, and they were not compromised. Cobb writes,

"The movement toward rationality, individuality, and freedom is of such attractive force and leads to so great an expansion of power over self and world as to be virtually irreversible."[90] This new spiritual existence transcended the wryness of Greek rationalism and the legalism of Prophetic Judaism.

> The emergence of a center of existence transcending reason and passion, and responsible for decision and action, constituted the unique structure of personal existence. In spiritual existence, this center remained as the will, but it was objectified as one element within the whole psyche and was thereby transcended by a new center that took responsibility also for the will. In this way, spiritual existence took another step along the line away from preaxial existence, incorporating and preserving personal existence in a more inclusive synthesis.[91]

Second, this new spirituality brought a profound sense of personal and social responsibility to the members of the primitive church. But Christian responsibility was different from that which existed during Old Testament times. Although Prophetic Judaism led to responsible social and personal behavior, it was driven by the mechanics of the demand for obedience to the laws and traditions. The individuals' or groups' responsibility for ethical conduct did not weigh heavily on their rational capacities, nor on their emotional commitments, but on their will power to observe and obey. One needed only to exercise his or her will power to obey the dictates of the Laws of Moses and Torah. Obedience to divine dictates did not require rationalizing. Cobb writes, "Prophetic existence is personal existence that exercises its personal responsibility in trust and obedience. Christian existence is spiritual existence that exercises its new freedom in love."[92] In this new Christian existence, one freely and spontaneously responded to the work of the Spirit in one's life. There was no coercion from any source other than the inspiration of the Spirit to lead and guide. The rational, volitional and

emotional powers within were harnessed to the fullest extent possible. This laid a heavy burden of responsibility on the individual. Cobb writes,

> The Christian had to accept a responsibility for his existence as a whole in a way that separated him from Judaism. This meant that he must understand himself as transcending his will in the sense of his power of choice among practicable alternatives in a given situation. He was responsible not only for his choice but also for the motive of his choosing. He was responsible for being the kind of self who could not will to choose to have the motive he should.[93]
>
> In spiritual existence, a new level of transcendence appeared. The self became responsible for the choice of the center from which it organized itself and not only for what it chose from a given center. If it chose to identify itself as will and to accept the bondage to moral obligation that was therein entailed, it could do so. But it need not do so, and it should not do so. If it did do so, it was responsible for this choice as well as for the further choices that it made as will.[94]

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. . . . . .

But as we see it, this personal freedom and responsibility for ethical living did not last long. When the church was absorbed by Roman and Byzantine Imperialists, new ecclesiastical structures evolved. The institutionalized church and its hierarchy began to reflect the coercive powers of the state. Creating and enforcing ethical and moral laws, and regulating personal and social conduct were taken over by the state and the ecclesiastical institutions sponsored by it. Ordinary Christians were forced to abide by the dictates of the church hierarchy. This situation continued almost until the dawn of Reformation.

Third, this new spirituality was largely experienced in social contexts. People lived in communities while sharing and ministering to one another's needs. Of course, there were in some isolated pockets, efforts toward private spiritual existence away from all social contacts. The Desert Fathers spearheaded the movement that led to the development of monastic orders. But these were not the central features of the primitive church. The

New Testament church was predominantly a communal institution. Although driven underground during the years of persecution, for all practical purposes, it remained a "base community." The spirituality of the base communities endowed the members with enchanting human qualities and character necessary for that sort of living. Cobb writes,

> The church attained an understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in which the Hebrew axial achievement was affirmed and carried farther. Paul interpreted the indwelling, empowering, and transforming Spirit as personal Spirit interacting with human personal spirit. . . . He saw in the spirit a pervasive power working continually within the Christian to produce peace, joy, patience, humility and love.[95]

The base communities consisted of people irrespective of their racial, linguistic and class differences. It attempted to be inclusive.[96] Even sex discrimination, which was a pronounced feature of Christianity by the second century, was minimal in the early church. In the upper room where the first Pentecost was experienced, we witness the presence of a large group of women who seemed to have been swept by the experience without any discrimination or embarrassment.

A central feature of this new spirituality and communal experience was the power of love. Cobb devotes a chapter to discuss the topic of love and especially the uniqueness of Christian love. Among the many qualities of Christian love, this one stands out as the most enchanting. Cobb writes,

> In Christian love, we are free from bondage to ourselves without ceasing to be the self-transcending selves of spiritual existence. Lover and loved retain their full personal, responsible autonomy. Love imposes no demand on the one loved; it seeks, rather, his freedom. There is no merging of self and other, as in the love of desire and adoration.[97]

Popular love is open to loving the lovable. But a Christian lover goes a step further and opens himself to loving the unlovable and the unlovely. It is this transcendent character of Christian love that enabled the first century Christians to love their enemies and pray for those who persecuted them. On the other hand, Christian love is also sacrificial. For the sake of the loved one, the lover partakes in the pain and the suffering of the loved one. In spite of the tremendous costs involved, the Christian love does not flinch, but rather continues to love and seek the good of the loved thereby increasing the lover's capacity for love. This bestows a sense of abiding peace and joy in the lover.[98] These qualities and the fruit of the spirit are modeled after the life, work and sufferings of Christ. Christian spirituality is a mystery and many of its paradoxes are beyond rational grasp. One can only experience its richness by being open to life in the spirit. This transcendent spirituality and the resulting Christian love have the power to overcome barriers. And because of these endearing qualities of this primitive spirituality -- the transcendent spirituality and love -- we join with Cobb in affirming that Christianity has a legitimate claim on our lives.

Cobb confined his discussions on spiritual existence and love to social contexts. When he wrote the book, the age of ecology had not dawned. As such, he did not see ecological concerns integral to the compendium of Christian spirituality. The question we raise is this. Might the transcendent spirituality which Cobb advocates in The Structure of Christian Existence be inclusive enough to accommodate Earthism – the growing eco-spirituality of the postmodern age? Would he see this transcendent spirituality – the spirit or "self-transcending self"[99]-- as transcending non-human barriers?

The popular understanding of spirituality (including mainstream Christian spirituality) is that it is beyond any materiality and physical dynamics. Such a sense of transcendence has contributed to the alienation of humans from nature. Although, we do not wish to read more than what Cobb might have intended, going by Cobb's use of the term *transcendence* in the context of loving relationships beyond one's own natural capacities, we see the possibilities of the this spiritual force to be able to breakdown barriers as well as expand to include non-human elements in loving relationships. In the introduction to this dissertation, we asked whether Christianity might hold the promise for accommodating and advancing Earthism -- the rising eco-spiritual phenomenon of the post modern age. We need to ask whether this "transcendent spirituality" of the primitive church or any of its extensions might be the forum for such accommodations. Of course, we recognize that much work needs to be done in this area. This study is a contribution to such an effort. We leave this for the time being and turn to John Hick, the last of the scholars we have chosen to study.

John Hick

Like John Cobb, John Hick is a prolific author. One of his many books, An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent,[100] devotes considerable attention to the axial phenomenon. In the introduction to this study, we referred briefly to Hick's definition of the study of religion as a phenomenology of human presence and interaction with the world of nature. But Hick does not delve deeply into human-world contexts of religion, especially the environmental dimensions of

religion in relation to human ecology. Hick sees religion as a natural phenomenon based on distinct characteristics of the human situation. Hick writes, "[R]eligion [i]s a self-regulating response of the human animal to the pressures generated by its particular niche within the biological system."[101] We referred to this definition of religion essentially to stress that the history of religion cannot ignore the wider frame of reference -- a reference that would include human-world relations as one of the most important dynamics for the phenomenology of religion. We pointed out in the introduction that many studies on religion leave out this important dimension. Hick, a philosopher, looks at the philosophical underpinning of religion within the framework of human-world relations, and he examines the axial development in the same vein.

It is interesting to note that Hick, like other scholars, considers the axial idea an important tool -- a broad interpretive concept that informs the phenomenology of religion. Hick writes,

> The second [*the first being the universality of religion]* widely accepted large-scale interpretive concept is the distinction between pre-axial religion, centrally [but not solely] concerned with the preservation of cosmic and social order, and post-axial religion, centrally [but not solely] concerned with the quest for salvation or liberation [additions mine].[102]

Like Cobb, who delved into the structure of the human psyche to understand the axial phenomenon, Hick also looks at social psychology to expose the philosophical underpinning of post-axial religions. According to Hick, the actual substance of the axial mentality is clearly visible in the philosophical paradigms that sustain post-axial religions. It is in the realm of social psychology that the distinction between the pre-axial and post-axial religions comes out with clarity. Hick writes,

> Pre-axial religion has both psychological and sociological dimensions. Psychologically it is an attempt to make stable sense of life, and particularly of the basic realities of subsistence and propagation and the final boundaries of birth and death, within a meaning-bestowing framework of myth. . . . The underlying concern is conservative, a defense against chaos, meaninglessness and the breakdown of social cohesion. Religious activity is concerned to keep fragile human life on an even keel; but it is not concerned, as is post-axial religion, with its radical transformation.[103]

Hick's observation can be confirmed by the findings of the recent studies on the history of religions and anthropology, especially the voluminous studies coming out on primal hunting-gathering societies, which of late have begun to draw much attention. Our task here is to add another dimension to these studies by directing our attention to the changes that were actually occurring on the eco-social front during this period. These changes, we observe, point in the direction of a widespread ecological crisis during the axial and pre-axial ages. Pre-axial and post-axial religions are radically different in this one point. While pre-axial religions sought everlasting sameness and permanence in human-world relations, post-axial religions looked for radical transformation of existing and deteriorating human-world existence. Could Hick's observations suggest the possibility of a serious breakdown of human-world relations during the late pre-axial age?

To substantiate his thesis, Hick, like Bellah, appeals to W. E. H. Stanner's study on Australian aborigines -- a contemporary people whose existence is in some ways analogous to the communities of pre-axial times. Stanner writes that, in the aborigine's thought, there is

> no notion of grace or redemption; no whisper of inner peace and reconcilement; no problems of worldly life to be solved only by a consummation of history; no heaven of reward or hell of punishment . . . [S]ameness, absence of change, fixed routine, regularity, call it what

> you will, is a main dimension of their thought and life. Let us sum up this aspect as leading to metaphysical emphasis on *abidingness*. They place a very special value on things remaining *unchangingly themselves* . . . [emphasis mine].[104]

Abidingness speaks of remaining constant on an even keel. A clear sense of past, present and future is absent in the primal thought forms. The notion of time repeating in a cyclical form was a development of a later epoch -- an epoch that saw the rise of agrarian and pastoral life and civilized existence when the observed changes of season and the annual cycle of decay and regeneration of nature were celebrated in the annual enthronement of the warrior-king year after year.[105]

Secondly, pre-axial communities accepted life with all its joys and pains. There was no confrontation with or overcoming of a given situation or reality. Quoting Robert Bellah, Hick also points out that a simple world-acceptance marked pre-axial religions. The axial revolution replaced this world-acceptance with outright world-rejection.

> In terms of religious phenomenology the new movements arising in the axial period exhibit a soteriological structure which stands in marked contrast to the relatively simple world-acceptance of pre-axial religion. In the archaic world life was variously endured and enjoyed but not fundamentally criticized.[106]

In contrast to world-acceptance, post-axial religions regard this life as imperfect, defective, unsatisfactory, lacking.[107]

> The great post-axial traditions, as we have seen, exhibit in their different ways a soteriological structure which identifies the misery, unreality, triviality and perversity of ordinary human life, affirm an ultimate unity of reality and value in which or in relation to which a limitlessly better quality of existence is possible, and show the way to realize that radically better possibility. Thus the generic concept of salvation/liberation, which takes a different specific form in each of the great traditions, is that of the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to reality-centeredness.[108]

One of the hallmarks of post-axial religious traditions is soteriology -- the human quest for salvation and liberation. Hick's observations force us to set the whole salvation/liberation debate in the context of human-world relations and existence. Soteriology was a cardinal tenet of axial religions. The metaphysics of soteriology is set in the human-world context and it is in this context that it needs to be understood and interpreted. The essential features of axial soteriology can be summed up as follows.

-- The world of nature, human society and the human body sustained by the world are in reality fundamentally nefarious, ridden with evil.

-- The essential human experience of these realities is one of pain and suffering rather than pleasure, play and contentment.

-- The actuality of these realities is beyond redemption.

-- Humans need, therefore, to hope and look for the re-creation of the whole universe.

-- If re-creation is impossible, humans must strive to escape or migrate to another state of existence beyond the world of contemporary existence.

This is where post-axial religion offers its cosmic optimism beyond this world. Hick writes,

> It affirms the ultimate goodness from our human point of view, or to-be-rejoiced-in character, of the universe . . . . For post-axial religious optimism does not affirm the goodness of our earthly life in its present untransformed state. On the contrary, at this point the post-axial faiths have been typically negative and in that sense pessimistic. In a very general sense we can even say that archaic religion -- even though with ample exceptions -- was optimistic and world-affirming whilst the new insights of the axial age brought a wave of world-denial and a widespread sense of the hollowness, transitoriness and unsatisfactoriness of ordinary human existence. This immediate pessimism is however linked with an ultimate optimism. . . . And so the cosmic optimism of the post-axial

> religions is a vision of the ultimately benign character of the universe as it affects us human beings and an anticipation in faith that limitlessly good possibilities of existence will finally be realized.[109]

Hick then goes on to elaborate how every major world religion works out its own plan of salvation and liberation. Invariably, the plan of salvation is one of totally rejecting this decaying world in exchange for a coming permanent unchanging reality. The essence of these soteriological motifs is manifested in all post-axial religions.

However, Hick cautions us not to generalize the soteriological thrust on all post-axial groups. He spells out two possible objections to the generalization of salvation-liberation as the overall thrust of the axial mentality. The first is that the general characterization does not fit every group even within axial communities and movements. Mysticism is a movement within all major post – axial religious traditions that pursues a different path. Although marginalized within the institutionalized religions, mysticism is essentially an acceptance of and integration into, rather than escape from, the present reality. While liberation and soteriological motifs seek escape from this world, mysticism helps one to experience the unity of all things and to integrate human hopes and fears with the world and social processes rather than seek an escape or negation of these realities.[110]

The second most important objection, Hick says, comes from feminists. The axial revolution emerged in a patriarchal context. All axial thinkers and prophets were men. Their thinking essentially reflected the drive of the male psyche. Axial categories of thoughts, feminists say, do not reflect the feminine psyche. The primary sins of males are pride and arrogance and these should not be imposed on women. For females, Hick says,

> [S]elf-assertion is not the basic human temptation but rather the characteristic *male* temptation; . . . but self-abnegation and failure to achieve authentic selfhood; and the function of divine grace is not so much to shatter the assertive ego as to support a weak ego towards true self-realization. For half the human race salvation will not bring a change from, but on the contrary a change to, self-centeredness [original emphasis]![111]

These are very important objections from the point of view of our study. It will be argued later that it was during the pre-axial and axial age that the status of both women and nature was not only degraded but also came to be thought of as the repository of evil and deception. These two objections point to a very important dynamic of axial formulations. As we pointed out earlier, the axial revolution left untouched groups that were outside its influence. But Hick's observations point to the fact that the psychological thrust of the axial revolution did not even appeal to all sectors within axial societies. Its soteriological motifs of seeking escape from the world turned out to be psychologically anathema for some. Interestingly, in this age of ecology, we witness eco-feminists and eco-spiritualists in the forefront of environmental movements all over the world.

Hick's presentation raises some pertinent questions. We employed Hick's definition of religion precisely because it set the conversations on religion and the environment within the context of human-world existence and relations. Besides, when Hick published An Interpretation of Religion in 1989, the environmental movement had long been a hot issue. Hick might have suggested ecological changes as a possible cause for the rise of axial thought. Instead, he could only conclude that "the whole subject of the axial age, its causes, nature and consequences, is ripe for further research and clarification."[112]

Summary

These five scholars agree that the post-axial religions show a marked negativity toward the world and that world-rejection was a primary characteristic of the soteriological stance they exude. Both Bellah and Hick acknowledge this fact explicitly. It also seems to lie in the background in the works of Jaspers, Mumford and Cobb. We submit that the world-rejecting and soteriological motifs of the post-axial manifestations were largely brought about by the negative experience of humans on the environmental front. Of course, we need to await further support for this conclusion from green history.

While reading through the writings of scholars on the axial period, we stumble upon certain serendipities, which themselves stand out as unsolved mysteries. While some scholars make only passing references, others failed to observe these altogether. What they observe or fail to observe has profound implications for our study.

One of these serendipities is the fact that axialism arose in urban cultural milieus and in communities on the periphery of urban influence. We read the axial development essentially as an urban phenomenon. We see it occurring simultaneously in major centers of ancient civilization, transforming and endowing them with new vitality toward cultural advance. The religions that grew out of this urban revolution still dominate the world. Why did this development occur in the urban context and not elsewhere? What in the urban psychology and gestalt was conducive to the rise of axial mentality?

A second fact is that this urban revolution occurred independently and simultaneously in several centers in different parts of the world. These centers had little or no contact

with each other. What was the overall dynamic that caused the sudden spurt of the axial revolution all across the world?

Thirdly, the axial revolution, though global, was confined to and shaped by its local context and dynamics. Every local revolution gave rise to a unique brand of religious tradition peculiar to its context, although it manifested the overarching themes of world-rejection, liberation and salvation common to all. How do we account for the variations in spite of their fundamental unity on world-negation?

What we observe is that although axialism was widespread, there were pockets of peoples that were left unscathed by its torrents. The first group to which we refer consists of the hunting-foraging communities. These were largely unaffected by axial influence and have continued to survive in pockets in Africa, Australia, South East Asia, and the Americas. Contemporary anthropologists have come to regard primal societies with positive valuation. Of course they do so more in contrast to modernity than to the axial age. However, the rediscovery of the ecological values of primal communities enchants postmodern theoreticians and deep ecologists. A reference to the axial cannot, therefore, ignore the value of primal communities and their relations to their environment. Paul Shepard and John Cobb admonish us to take seriously and acknowledge the importance of pre-historic cultures in the study of religion and history.[113] We also believe that it is possible and perhaps wise on the part of those isolated contemporary hunting-foraging communities to enter the postmodern age without the scourge of having to evolve through axial advance. Postmodern theoreticians should pay close attention to the ecological wisdom and practices of the primal peoples.

We who are at the threshold of the postmodern era are called upon to draw from the eco-sensible resources of the primal societies.

Another type of culture that did not live to see the dawn of the axial period is that of the ancient civilizations, some of which have vanished. The ancient civilization of the Harappan Valley in India and the Sumero-Akkadian, Egyptian, Aegean, and Syrian civilizations of the Ancient Near East are cases in point. If axialism, as we claim, was essentially a phenomenon of urban civilization, why did these ancient civilizations vanish even before they could grow to maturity to experience axial revolutions themselves? Besides, axialism did not appeal psychologically to every group even within societies that were swept by the revolution. As Hick points out, two groups -- women and mystics -- stand out as those who could not totally participate in the revolution due to their psychic make up. We had also pointed out earlier that these groups by and large are more favorably disposed toward the world than their axial counterparts.

The ecology crisis of the pre-axial times was largely at the root of axial human disenchantment with nature. This disenchantment shows through the negative valuation of the world as reflected in most axial religions. The axial age was also a time of crisis for religion as a whole. A crisis is symptomatic of structural instability and a time of anxiety. For societies and cultures -- agrarian, pastoral and urban -- confronted by the crisis, axial formulations offered a panacea showing a way of escape to continued human survival and advance. Those societies and cultures, such as hunting-foraging communities unaffected by the environmental crisis, did not participate in the axial response. Meanwhile, civilizations and societies that faced environmental crises but

failed to respond creatively collapsed and vanished from the scene before axial thinking could emerge and transform their destiny.

These scholars have shown us that the axial period is not the only one of critical significance in the evolution of humankind and in the history of religion. Mircea Eliade and others point out that human cultural evolution from hunting-gathering to agricultural and pastoral life styles at the end of the Ice Age was an important transition in the history of religion. We observe in this epoch that moving from one form of existence to another gave rise to new structures of religious existence.[114] The evolution of agricultural and pastoral cultures from hunting-foraging existence effected in many respects a thoroughgoing transformation on all fronts. It not only transformed the existence of primal human societies, but also ushered in new corresponding cults.

The axial development, on the other hand, did not change the essential nature of civilized existence, especially the human-world relations. It basically carried the pre-axial structures of human-world existence from the pre-axial age into the post-axial period. The essential features of human societies, such as agriculture, herding, urbanization, craft, trade, wars, patriarchy and imperialism, continued unchanged. On the religious front, however, it brought about profound changes by giving rise to new religions, many of which continue into the present day. Although peoples' occupations did not change, their religion changed. How could such a drastic beginning occur on the religious front while there was hardly any change in the essential structures of human-world relations and existence?

Conversely, we find another scenario in the rise of modernism. Modernism gave rise to industrialism, which profoundly transformed the physical and social structures of human existence. It opened up new vistas for travel, communication, science and increased standard of living. Peoples' basic lifestyle, vocation and values changed. But modernism as such remained largely a secular force. It did not go to the extent of creating lasting religious movements. We may argue that ideologies like nationalism, fascism, economism and technologism exude religious acumen and are therefore, in some sense, quasi-religions. Nevertheless, what characterize religion is missing in these modern enterprises. None of these modern movements is comprehensive enough to encompass the whole gamut of human life, experiences and aspirations. They do not fit the comprehensive definition of religion we employ in this study. Most axial traditions strive to retain some measure of the complexity and the breadth of their comprehensiveness. Most axial traditions still make sense to their votaries. Therefore, peoples of the modern era continue to follow religious traditions formed during the axial period. Nevertheless, modernism has made deep inroads into the axial traditions. What would be the ultimate nature of this transformation has yet to become clear.

Although these samples are not exhaustive in any sense, they do provide some clues to understanding the causes of the rise of axialism. In the first scenario, the transition from hunting-foraging to agricultural and pastoral life styles brought about profound changes on all fronts --changes in the structure of human existence and the rise of new agrarian and pastoral cults. In the second scenario, the axial epoch left the essential structures of human-world existence essentially the same while effecting profound and radical changes

on the religious front. In the third scenario, the modern era ushers in profound changes in the structures of human existence but hardly effects any changes on the religious front. All living world religions continue adjusting to modernity. These are issues that the scholars on axialism have unwittingly exposed but have not pursued to their logical conclusion. This study will throw light on some of these questions. We hope that this will offer a new understanding of the phenomenology of religion, as well as provide the possibility for gaining a clearer understanding of the human-world premises for the phenomenology of religion.

A word or two on the founders and prophets of axial revolution should be in order. We have not talked much about them, nor do we intend to present them completely during the course of this study. We do refer to a few selected personalities and look at their contributions to axial revolution and the world negating soteriologies their teachings and traditions engendered. Nonetheless, we need to recognize the fact that without them the axial revolution would not have seen the light of the day. All of them together add substantially to the flowering of the axial movement.

They had much in common. All of them were males. Most of them lived and worked in cities. Their education and skills class them with urban gentry. Even if they spoke about the rural life, they did so as urbanites observing the countryside. Their views and teachings were tinctured by the prevailing norms of the urban centers. Although on occasion, they did speak against injustice and human evil, they did not create movements that would topple the prevailing social structures and ignominious social institutions. A theme that runs through their teachings is that of world negation and soteriology. On this

score, they all seem to stand in unison. And for this reason, we submit that these axial stars were not original in advancing the world-negating ideas. Rather, the uniformity of their stance is a pointer to the general mood in the wider society. Negativity toward nature and society was a prevailing sentiment in the axial society. These world-negating ideas were not concocted in the schools of prophets and philosophers. What the axial prophets and philosophers did was to give vent to these popular sentiments through their religious and philosophical teachings. On the other hand, they also put forward a number of new religious and philosophical ideas for their generation and options for the future. They did so by offering alternate strategies to overcome the widespread moods of despondency and thereby rekindled the hopes of the common people toward a better future. The fact that they came up with alternate strategies to overcome the widespread despondency shows some resistance to the alienation. When we come to Greece (in Chapter 8), we see this tendency manifests itself in the resistance to Gnosticism. Gnosticism is a purer case of alienation. Primitive Christianity (as well as most streams of Judaism) stands opposed to Gnosticism and its total rejection of the world. Nevertheless, some strategies advanced by the leaders to overcome alienation also accentuated world-negating tendencies and further contributed to alienation of humans from nature and society. For these reasons, it should not be construed that the axial prophets, philosophers and religious leaders were the sole creators of the alienation or the world negating soteriologies. These leaders sincerely sought to find positive ways of living in a context of alienation and hopelessness. Nevertheless, they also participated in

the alienation. It became a part of their teaching and spread through the movements they initiated.

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Notes
Chapter 2
~~Scholars Views on Axial Traditions~~

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This Ibid. refers back to Bellah (last author named). But text appears to be citing Cobb. – see p. 61 ↑ and give specific title

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CHAPTER 3

Changes in Weather as Major Influences on Pre-axial Societies

A cursory reading of the environmental history of ancient civilizations shows a predictable pattern of vanishing woodlands and the advance of deserts in these regions. There are four important characteristics to this pattern. First, the saga is observed taking place at the core centers. The same scenario occurs from Egypt to China and beyond. Second, it was contemporaneous, which means, the scenario unfolds within a relatively brief span of time. In fact, if we take a sweeping view of the evolution of humans and human societies from the primal epoch to the axial epoch, we find that the transition from one stage to the next is very rapid. The human advance from hunting-gathering to agrarian-pastoral to city states to imperial societies occurred within a span of about eight millennia. Third, with minor variations, the human response everywhere was somewhat similar to the changing conditions of the biological niches. The retreat or advance of human culture was directly affected by the changes in topography and climate. The earliest civilizations arose in societies that were confined to the arid desert regions served by perennial rivers, and these societies responded to the vagaries of their immediate environment in quite similar ways. The similarity of their development points to a universal pattern in which human societies of preaxial epochs seem to interact with the environment more as subjects than as masters. Fourthly, these societies were afflicted by many social ills, such as wars, patriarchy, class, caste, slavery, and imperialism forced displacements of people groups and colonialism. Although one could argue that the root of these social quandaries may be found in human proclivity for evil and penchant for

mastery over other human beings, the widespread and contemporaneous nature of their manifestations suggest that these were also to some extent responses to the external dynamics over which humans had least control. The common human response draws attention to larger environmental dynamics that were at work at the core centers during preaxial epochs.

In the light of these facts, the human story requires consideration of influences other than the power of human presence on the planet. The widespread environmental crises of the pre-axial age -- the advancing deserts, retreating forests, loss of grasslands and topsoil in and around the core centers of the ancient world -- can not be merely from local and regional human encounter with nature. Such narrow explanations fail to account for the widespread and contemporaneous nature of the advent of agricultural and pastoral revolutions, the rise and fall of ancient civilizations and empires and the advent of axial age. These phenomena demand a larger and more comprehensive frame of reference and explanation. Widespread environmental crises and the rise of imperialism need also to be considered in terms of human response to the regional, global and planetary changes and dynamics. The scholars we referred to in Chapter 2, in fact, set the trend in looking at these developments from wider perspectives and from the fields of their expertise. Karl Jaspers drew our attention to the universal nature of axial phenomena. In the same vein, John Cobb observed the universal character of the evolution of the human self -- the transformation of the human psyche from one level to the next as it crosses different thresholds during its long evolutionary process. Although Cobb traced the internal dynamics of the growth of the human psyche, in asking, "Where in human development

are the great thresholds crossed?" he prompted us to look at the larger picture of societal evolution.[1] In the same vein, green historians draw our attention to the universality of the environmental crisis faced by every ancient society. Earth scientists, on the other hand, have observed changes in the global weather patterns during the last 15,000 years. They point out instances of abrupt changes in the climate. Such observations prompt us to look closely at the sweeping evolutionary and social revolutions that took place at the core centers during the last ten millennia B.C.E. It appears that these larger forces not only connect the seemingly scattered and disconnected experiences of different societies, but also affect the environment of that epoch in such a way as to create conditions that called forth new human strategies.

Recent scholarly developments lead us to perceive local, regional and global environmental changes in the light of what is taking place in nature. Earth sciences inform us that orbital dynamics play a large role in the status of the global environment. Some of these dynamics gather momentum gradually; others visit the planet with sudden force, effecting massive changes in environmental conditions. Human societies are caught up in the inescapable sway of these forces. Scholars and scientists are beginning to read the evolution of human societies from the larger perspective of planetary dynamics. The wealth of data available from scores of archeological and scientific studies now gives us the opportunity to construct a coherent picture and sequence of the evolution of human societies. The causes of the agrarian and pastoral revolutions and the rise and fall of ancient civilizations are no longer completely shrouded in mystery.[2]

The evidence we will present in subsequent chapters is mainly from analyses of local

and regional contexts. But if we confine our observation to human perspectives, we may conclude that the failure of the human-world front in any epoch or region, as well as the emerging alienation from nature, was due only to human presence and pursuits. Human beings are children of nature. Although endowed with immense capacity for creativity and intelligent behavior, the human species is very vulnerable, because it is at the top of the food chain. Before the modern era, the fortunes of human societies swayed with the whims of environmental forces. Power to control and harness the forces of nature was not within the reach of pre-industrial societies. We need to look also at the larger picture to see both humans and their immediate environment responding to changes over which they had no control.

That global and solar dynamics play upon local and regional environments was something known to our ancestors from primal times. However, our ancestors perceived those phenomenal changes mythically, and much of their response to these larger environmental dynamics was unconsciously driven. Although astronomy and the calendar were developed by ancient urban societies, they did not understand accurately the nexus between the celestial and terrestrial dynamics.

Earth Scientists, biologists and anthropologists have long seen the nexus between the fluctuations of the wider cosmic context -- terrestrial and celestial environments -- and biological evolution. Changes in climate affect not only the evolution of human societies and cultures, but also the evolution and extinction of flora and fauna. That the changes in the larger environment influenced the agrarian revolution and the rise and fall of ancient civilizations is something that we are gradually coming to recognize and acknowledge.

We are yet to fathom the details fully. An exhaustive study of the nexus between the evolution of human culture and societies and changes in the environment, both terrestrial and celestial is beyond the scope of this study. Our interest lies mainly in finding the *raison d'être* for the axial anxiety and negativity toward nature. The radical change in the human disposition toward nature -- from the primal harmony with nature to the axial antagonism toward nature -- can be understood only within a comprehensive picture.

We will use the term "epoch" quite frequently throughout this study. The disciplines of geology and paleontology employ terms like "era," "period," and "epoch," with precise meanings and boundaries. These terms are commonly used in Earth Sciences to demarcate units of time as points of reference to catalog the planetary, geological, atmospheric and climatalogical events and the evolution and extinction of plants and animals occurring within those spans.[3] While "era" and "period" refer to larger temporal scales, "epoch" refers to the briefest span within an "era" and a "period." Thus, the present epoch -- the Holocene-Flandrian epoch, which began around 10,000 years BCE -- occurs within the Quaternary period (2 million years to the present) of the Cenozoic era which began about 65 million years ago. The term "epoch" is used here, both in the environmental and historical sense to denote the stages of the evolution of human societies with marked beginnings and ends. We also use the terms "phase" and "stage" alternatively to connote smaller segments in an epoch. For instance, we may speak of "early-Holocene phase" which refers to a few millennia at the start of the Holocene epoch. We show that the evolution of human societies up to the time of axial age was to

a large extent influenced and directed by what went on in the larger environmental contexts.

Pre-axial Humans: Subjects of the Environment?

The advances made by Earth Sciences over the last few decades provide accurate and comprehensive information, especially on the last 20,000 years of Earth's history. Models based on the instrumental records of recent climatic changes and the proxy records contained within the earth itself -- like marine sediments and ice cores -- can inform us about typical temperature and precipitation patterns, and features as detailed as the geographical ranges of specific flora and fauna.[4] The sediments of lakes and wetlands are potentially rich sources of information about past environments, not only of the lakes or of wetlands themselves, but also of the surrounding terrain. These features have been confirmed by pollen-lake-level-fossil records and have been reproduced by meteorological models of atmospheric circulation and precipitation. Our interest here lies mainly in the changes observed at the core centers of civilization from the late-glacial period about 12,000 B.C.E. to the axial epoch that dawned during the first millennium B.C.E.

Fluctuations and changes in the earth's climate, both spatially and temporally, are due to such external factors as changes in solar radiation and to such internal factors as adjustments within the earth's atmospheric circulation and ocean currents. Sunspot-cycles, for example, have often been cited as a possible cause for changes in the amount of radiation emanating from the sun. Each Sunspot-cycle is about11 years. During the cycle, high-energy particles from the Sun's middle latitudes drift toward the equator. The

quality and quantity of solar radiation reaching the Earth's surface are also affected by other variables. Volcanic eruptions, for example, result in the emission of dust into the atmosphere that may scatter and partially reflect incoming solar radiation, leading to reduced temperatures. Another significant force that affects the climatic perturbations and patterns is the 18.6-year lunar tidal-forcing cycle. However, changes that occur in response to these events are short-lived and occur as minor perturbations, which are overwhelmed by larger cycles of planetary processes.[5]

The Earth's present climate is considerably different from that between 15000 to 6000 B.C.E. The difference is due in large measure to changes in Earth's orbit. The influence of orbital variations on the solar radiation received by Earth affects its climate considerably. Available evidence shows that there were abrupt changes in the long-term climatic conditions of Earth during the close of the glaciation period, between 15,000 and 9000 B.C.E. These were produced by changes in the orientation of Earth's axis -- the angle of tilt between the axis of rotation of Earth relative to the Earth-Sun orbit. The Sun-Earth distance decreased in northern summer while the axial tilt increased.

The Earth's orbital variations are influenced by three factors:

1. Eccentricity -- the degree of ellipticity of its orbit round the Sun.

2. The angle of tilt -- the orientation of the axis of rotation with respect to its orbital path.

3. Precession of the equinoxes -- the planet's wobbles around the angle of tilt. The earth wobbles like a spinning top as it precesses around its axis of rotation.

These changes take place gradually over a long period. The degree of change is forced upon the Earth by the gravitational attraction of other bodies in the solar system -- the

sun, the moon, and the planets. These changes affect the quantity and quality of the solar radiation received by particular regions of the planet, and they are predictable.[6] About 10,000 years ago, the inclination of earth's rotational axis relative to the ecliptic plane was about 24.5°, and the closest approach of the orbiting Earth to the Sun (perihelion) occurred in July. This condition resulted in about 8% more solar radiation reaching the northern hemisphere in the summer and about 8% less in winter compared to the present situation of a 23.5° inclination angle and a January perihelion.[7] Since about 9,000 B.C.E., these levels have gradually approached modern values. Although these changes may be infinitesimal in themselves, over long periods they can have enormous impact on the climate and the weather patterns on the Earth.

Many aspects of climate change that affect the biological substance of the planet can be understood as arising naturally out of orbitally induced variations in the magnitude and seasonality of solar radiation. These changes in radiation produce periodic temperature changes that modify the glacial ice sheets, sea-to-land circulation patterns, precipitation intensity, seasonality, and patterns of vegetative response, and consequently the makeup of the animal population. Although climate is inherently variable, broad aspects of that variability can be understood as consequences of the most basic aspects of Earth's astronomical and surface properties.[8]

Scientists believe that the present age is an inter-glacial period -- a warm period between two ice ages. While it is by no means certain when the next ice age will emerge, there is every reason to suppose that the cycles of glacials and interglacials will continue as evidenced in the deep-sea core and ice core. Antoinette Mannion believes,

> If the fossil evidence, particularly pollen assemblages, for the last 15,000 years is compared with that from previous interglacials, a number of similarities are obvious which also imply that the climatic cycles so far experienced will continue.[9]

There are four stages in the interglacial cycle. The first phase is termed the *cryocratic* phase. It is characterized by cold, arid continental conditions. The second phase is *protocratic,* when temperature ameliorates, precipitation increases and the grasslands, scrub and open woodlands emerge and spread. This is followed by the *mesocratic* phase, during which the climate reaches its optimum of the interglacial cycle. The Earth nurtures temperate deciduous woodlands and rich variety of fauna and flora. The *telocratic* phase is the final phase of the interglacial cycle and it is retrogressive. It is characterized by deterioration of soil, acidity and loss of vegetation cover and animal species. Ultimately the *cryocratic* phase is re-established and the glacial-interglacial cycle begins all over again.[10] These epicycles in the larger glacial-interglacial cycle are a way for the surface of the earth to renew itself and bring forth new life forms from one cycle to the next. It is like a Sabbath rest that facilitates the repeated rejuvenation of the planet by alternating between periods of incubation, flowering and withering programmed in its glacial-interglacial cycles. Such a rejuvenating process occurs in shorter cycles of climate changes at the bioregional levels as well.

From 15,000 B.C.E. to 11,000 B.C.E. the planet experienced the close of the last *cryocratic* phase. The period from the closing epochs of the *Pleistocene,* about 15,000 B.C.E., to early *Holocene,* beginning around 12,000 B.C.E., represents a time of global climatic changes referred to as the "deglaciation period." The environmental changes recorded in marine sediments, ice cores and glaciated land surfaces in high latitudes

reflect the melting of the ice sheets associated with increased temperature. In land areas, in the low to middle latitudes, the climatic changes during this period are seen primarily as changes in the amount of precipitation. Such changes are most dramatic in the desert boundary zones. Because of the steep climatic gradient at the desert boundary, even small geographic shifts in rainfall patterns can have a tremendous impact on local precipitation.[11] We see the pronounced effects of these rainfall patterns in the core centers. This was followed by a brief return to glacial conditions during the *Younger Drayas,* a cold and dry spell from about 11,000 to 10,000 B.C.E. Then came the *protocratic* period, 10,000 to 6000 B.C.E., of wet and rejuvenating weather. From 6000 B.C.E. to the present, we witness the *mesocratic* phase of optimum interglacial period when the weather turns warm with ice sheets melting at the poles. The coming millennia will witness the *teleocratic* phase of cold arid period before the glacial cycle will be established.[12]

The climatic changes of the last fifteen thousand years B.C.E. produced major changes in the environment. Our interests lie in the *protocratic* (from 10,000 to 6000 B.C.E.) and *mesocratic* (from 6000 B.C.E. to the present) phases of the Holocene epoch and the effects these had on the flora, fauna and human societies at the core centers. The present epoch is a Holocene epoch. In geological chronostratography, it spans over the last 12,000 years of planet Earth's 4.5 billion-year history. It is marked by a warming trend and a sea-level rise in the world ocean boundaries beginning from the end of *Younger Dryas* or "tundra stage" (ca.11000 – 10,000 B.C.E.).

Changes in human response to the changes in the environment were marked by human crossing of thresholds. Every threshold crossing effected a shift in the social paradigm. Thus we can cautiously conclude that human crossing from one threshold to the other – from primal to archaic (agrarian and pastoral modes), from archaic to civilized, from civilized to axial existences – were prompted by the planet-wide climatic changes. Such changes were more pronounced at the core centers than anywhere else.

We have been employing the term "core centers" quite frequently. Several features characterize core centers. Societies at the core centers experienced a faster pace of human crossing of thresholds – from primal to agrarian and herding stages leading to urban civilizations. Urban civilizations led to the eventual rise of nation-states and imperialism at these centers. While changes like these were taking place here, more distant societies, by and large, continued with primal modes of subsistence or were slowly evolving into semi-nomadic herding societies. Core centers are also distinguished by their desert-like environments that had actually metamorphosed from savanna type of regions. Societies at the core centers have readily responded to the changes in their environment caused by larger planetary events. We can identify these centers at places like Egypt, Mesopotamia, Levant, India and China. This study concentrates on the large-scale events that took place at Egypt, Mesopotamia and Levant. The sagas of the core centers we read are from accurately documented scientific, historical and archaeological evidences. Obviously there are exceptions to the overall patterns of development. Responses to atmospheric changes vary from region to region, but collectively they all form part of a global response to the wider glacial and interglacial cycles. Our narration briefly traces the

general trends of the climatic changes that occurred during the last fifteen thousand years B.C.E. and the changes these imposed on the centers where civilization arose.

Post-Glacial Period -- Cryocratic Phase (15,000 to 11,000 B.C.E.)

Prior to15,000 B.C.E., the Northern Hemisphere regions were covered by large ice sheets and substantial North Atlantic Sea ice. Mediterranean regions were cooler and dryer and covered with steppe vegetation and desert environments. The period between 15,000 and 11,000 B.C.E. saw rapid climatic and ecological changes on a global scale. With the waning of ice-sheets, temperatures and precipitation increased. Ecosystems with new species of flora and fauna emerged in regions that had been previously been covered in ice. Ice-sheets began to retreat to high and higher-middle latitudes approximately to their present positions.

With the retreat of ice sheets, and with the advent of the Holocene age, the Northern Hemisphere became wetter.[13] The present-day Sinai and Arabian deserts were dotted with many fresh-water lakes. In the southern regions, especially in the regions of eastern Sahara, Arabia and northwest India, woodlands and savannas emerged. The Dead Sea was at this time a fresh water lake and overflowed its banks. Arboreal pollen deposits indicate that these regions were heavily wooded. It was also a period that witnessed major changes in vertebrate fauna. Amelioration of the climate and relatively moist conditions made both the Saharan and Southwest Asian deserts into vast savanna regions with patches of woodland.[14] The Nile River reached high levels and flooded the plains regularly.[15]

This was a period that witnessed tremendous changes in the development and activities of human communities as *homo sapiens sapiens* emerged as a dominant force in the environmental system. Archeologists have uncovered a number of human settlement sites in the present-day Negev and Sinai deserts.[16] This was a time before the agrarian revolution when human societies subsisted by hunting and gathering in these regions. The wet condition was an impetus for intense wadi activities, especially around the water holes in otherwise arid regions.

Younger Dryas -- (Tundra Stage) 11;000 to 10,000 B.C.E.)

Between 11,000 to10,000 B.C.E., we witness a sudden return to glacial conditions called Younger Dryas. Although the exact dates and the length of the arid interval are not known, available data suggest that it lasted less than 1000 years. The return to glacial and arid conditions resulted in the withdrawal of wadi settlements and activities throughout the desert regions of North Africa, southwest Asia, India and China. Human societies at this time were still living by hunting and gathering, and with the spread of aridity, they could easily relocate following the migratory movements of the game animals. During this period, there is evidence for aridity in Palestine as well. Lake Lisan and the Dead Sea reached their lowest levels. Evidence for aridity was also seen in other parts of the eastern Mediterranean area and in the sudden regression of lakes in North Africa.[17] Saharan regions experienced severe dry conditions and loss of savanna grasslands at this time.[18] Available evidence shows the desert boundaries extended northwards as far as Syria.[19] The dry-cold spell affected the Near East and northwest India, North Africa and

China until the amelioration of temperatures and a return to a period of wet conditions made the deserts bloom around 10,000 B.C.E.[20]

Early Holocene -- Protocratic Phase (10,000 to 6000 B.C.E.)

This period marks the opening of the Holocene stage. It was a period when the Northern Hemisphere underwent a resurgence of warm and wet weather conditions.[21] Changes in the orbital trajectory of the planet caused an increase in the solar radiation reaching the Northern Hemisphere. This condition resulted in about 8% more solar radiation reaching the northern hemisphere in the summer and about 8% less in winter compared to the present situation. The changes enhanced the amplitude of the seasonal cycles of summertime land-ocean temperature contrasts, and thereby strengthened northern summer monsoons. Consequently, seasonality was enhanced in the Northern Hemisphere and reduced in the Southern Hemisphere relative to the present. This accentuated the seasonality on the Indian subcontinent and in China where strong monsoon patterns were established.

During the early Holocene, the Northern Hemisphere was warmer than today. The eastern Mediterranean regions underwent sharp changes toward higher temperatures, 2°-3° C more than the present-day levels.[22] Increased precipitation induced lush vegetation, which developed thick soil cover. The adjustment to more congenial climatic regimes involved considerable changes in floral and faunal elements as well as in soil genesis. New vegetation patterns encouraged the migration and expansion of various taxa from refugea. Europe gained extensive forest cover that lasted for nearly 5000 years. Palaeobotanic data indicate an expansion of boreal forests north of the modern treeline.

In Africa and Arabia, many lakes reached their highest level. The sapropel layers found in the eastern Mediterranean sediments date back to this period. They indicate a large volume of fresh water from the Nile floods.[23] The Sahel and Sahara were considerably wetter in early Holocene than they are today.[24] In North Africa, north of the Sahara, moist conditions also prevailed in the east at this time.[25] The Negev desert in Israel was covered with woodlands. Both Lake Lisan and the Dead Sea overflowed with constant flooding. The Dead Sea rose to its maximum level and overflowed its shore, emptying into the Red Sea. Many lakes in Africa and Arabia rose dramatically and this made possible the existence of a large population of fresh-water fauna in these lakes.[26] Pollen deposits indicate increased human habitation and vertebrate fauna in the regions of Syria, the Jordan valley, Sinai and the Arabian Peninsula.[27] This implies copious rainfall during that epoch that was almost twice the amount of current rainfall. The Sahara region was a vast savanna covered by annual grasses and low shrubs. Patches of woodlands were dotted all along its western and eastern fringes. A number of lakes and water holes made possible the existence of semi-permanent human settlements all over present-day Sahara. The presence of animals allowed for widespread hunting.[28] Available data indicate that by 9500 B.C.E., the central Negev was again inhabited. Human societies in these regions were highly innovative in resource use and in the domestication of plants and animals.[29] This was an epoch when agricultural and pastoral occupations were widely adopted all across the Fertile Crescent as human societies crossed another threshold.

Mid-Holocene -- Early Mesocratic Phase (6000 to 1000 B.C.E.)

Between 6000 and 3000 B.C.E., the general climatic conditions became similar to the

present day. Solar radiation gradually decreased to present values with the progression of the equinoctial precession.[30] This long-term cooling and drying from mid-Holocene was triggered by subtle changes in the Earth's orbit. The amplitude of the temperature range shrank, resulting in decreased precipitation. The gradual cooling and the advance of aridity can be observed by what has taken place in Israel since the early Holocene. In Israel, during 10,000-7000 B.C.E., the rainfall was highest with an average of 675 to 850 mm -- twice the average of the present day and the estimated temperature ranged from 14.5 to 19.0° C. During 7000-1000 B.C.E., the rainfall was 450 to 580 mm and the temperature was 18.0-22.0° C, as it is today.[31]

Although long-term changes in the climate may have been gradual, desertification in North Africa, Mesopotamia, northwest India and China began to advance rather rapidly. Scientists claim that the desertification at the core centers -- from the wet weather to aridity -- was due to the internal, regional, vegetation-atmosphere feedback of the climate systems. With the start of the mid-Holocene epoch, freshwater lakes in the Eastern Sahara gradually disappeared as aquifers ceased to be replenished. Martin Claussen and his colleagues speculate,

> Saharan desertification, the largest change in land cover during the last 6000 years, was a natural phenomenon as it can be described in terms of climate-system dynamics only. Although humans lived in the Sahara and used the land to some extent, we hypothesize that ancient land use played only a negligibly small role in mid-Holocene Saharan desertification.[32]

During the start of the mid-Holocene (from 7 to 5 millennia B.C.E.), the summer in many regions of the Northern Hemisphere was warmer than today.[33] The increase in warm climate nudged boreal forest north of the modern treeline. Boreal forests reached

their northern limits about the fifth millennium B.C.E. As summer temperatures decreased, the southern limits of several of the tree species had begun once more to shift toward the south. Earth scientists show that the transition to aridity during the mid-Holocene occurred in episodes -- from 6700 to 5500 and 4000 to 3600 B.C.E. Claussen and his colleagues say,

> It could have been the stimulus leading to the foundation of civilizations along the Nile, Euphrat[es] and Tigris rivers. . . [E]stimates on the timing of the transition phase at the end of the mid-Holocene as well as its impacts on society vary. There are data which suggest that the transition to present-day's arid climate did not occur gradually, but in two steps with two arid episodes, at 6.7 to 5.5 ka and at 4 to 3.6 ka. The latter was very severe, ruining ancient civilizations and socio-economic systems . . . . [T]he long-term cooling and drying from mid-Holocene to present-day is triggered by subtle changes in the Earth's orbit.[34]

The episodes of severe aridity caused a gradual movement of human settlements closer to the active channels of the Nile and its delta. Hoffman and Mills point out that this trend was in response to the desiccation and the decline in the Nile flood levels.[35] Similar progressive low flood levels and severe aridity have been observed in the regions of Euphrates, Tigris[36] and in the Indus river basin,[37] and the pattern continues until today. The desiccation and the advance of deserts forced human settlements at the interior to give up wadi activities and move closer to the riverbanks. By then, humans had mastered the art of agriculture and herding. Now they had to adopt these subsistence strategies to the new environment of the river deltas and banks. Urban settlements subsisting on agrarian and pastoral economies came to dot the banks and deltas of the perennial rivers of the desert regions.

In India, precipitation decreased in the river watershed after 4000-3500 B.C.E. Nile River runoff decreased considerably during this time and many fresh water lakes in the Sahara, the Sahel and Upper Egypt completely vanished.[38] Michael Hoffman and James Mills observe the stratigraphic evidences for a decline in the height of average annual Nile floods from around 3500 B.C.E. This coincided with the emergence of the pre-dynastic settlements of Upper Egypt -- a transition that marked the emergence of temple towns, increasing cultural contacts, and intensification of trade. Fluctuations in the Nile River run-off and floods began to affect Egyptian society and its politics. Widespread inter-city rivalries and conflicts gave rise to the emergence of a centralized dynastic reign that began around 3000 B.C.E. As more and more people migrated into the urban centers, urban civilization grew and with it came the golden age of ancient civilization. But the prosperity of the ancient civilization was cut short by the unabated desiccation, advance of deserts and the population pressure.

The synchronous disruptions of civilization at the core centers -- from Egypt to Greece, across the Near East and into the Indus Valley -- have puzzled both archeologists and Green Historians. They go on to point out that the climatic change of the mid-Holocene epoch was very severe and may have contributed to the fall of ancient civilizations. Some of them point to the severe aridification that came about due to abrupt climate changes that seemed to have occurred around 2200 B.C.E. The changes produced widespread glacial melting and the sea level reached 2-3m above present levels in many areas.[39] Harvey Weiss observes that the impact of this abrupt climate change spread all across Africa, Europe and Asia. Available evidences show that between 2345

to 2205 B.C.E. agriculture was abandoned all across the core regions due to widespread desiccation. Severe drought conditions visited Anatolia, the Fertile Crescent and North Africa, and consequently the urban centers of Sumer disintegrated, and Egyptian society suffered political unrests. Weiss and others postulate unusual sandstorms that swept all across the Eastern Mediterranean and Mesopotamian regions.[40] Sandstorms are very destructive. Prolonged sandstorms can blanket and bury towns and settlements within a matter of few days. Coupled with this, the plagues of desert locusts seem to have afflicted the arid regions of Africa and the Fertile Crescent since the mid-Holocene epoch. Plagues of locusts have been reported during the Pharaonic times in ancient Egypt. An average swarm of locusts will eat thousands of tons of vegetation daily, the weight of food that could meet the daily nutritional requirements of 20 million people. Plagues and severe arid conditions continued to prevail into the first millennium B.C.E. all across the Fertile Crescent, resulting in widespread drought. The drought and aridity spurred mass migration and military operations in the afflicted areas.[41] Scientists are uncertain as to why this sudden climatic change occurred. Several hypotheses have been advanced, from human abuse of the environment to wind erosion to planetary dynamics. Harvey Weiss writes,

> The robust geoclimatic data for abrupt climate change ca. 2200 BC appear in East Africa, Palestine, Anatolia, Northern Mesopotamia, Southern Mesopotamia, and the Gulf of Oman. Ignoring these data requires alternate explanations of the archaeological data for synchronous collapse from the Aegean to the Indus.[42]

The desertification that occurred at the core centers during the mid-Holocene period was quite important for human society. The desertification of Sahara, Arabia, northwest

India and elsewhere forced archaic agrarian settlements toward crossing the next threshold to ancient urban civilization. (We will deal with these threshold crossings in the ensuing chapters.) The continued desertification of these regions led to the eventual failure of the urban societies and nudged these societies to make another paradigm shift -- a shift toward the imperial epoch in which we witness the rise and fall of many empires and the eventual advance of axial epoch. In his concluding remarks, Weiss writes, "The abrupt climate change at 2200 B.C., regardless of an improbable impact explanation, situates hemispheric social collapse in a global, but ultimately cosmic, context."[43]

Summary

The central message of these readings is that we are beginning to view the human story in the cosmic context.[44] The above readings point to the fact that considerable debate exists as to the role of changing climate and environment in the evolution of human societies and their successive crossing of thresholds. When we consider all facts, we are moved to reckon the evolution of human societies and cultures influenced and prompted among other things, by planetary and cosmic events as well. From our vantagepoint, we reckon the changes in the modes of human societal existence largely as responses to geoclimatological events. We find that the planetary changes nudged the advance of human societies and cultures, especially at the core centers from the early to the mid-Holocene epochs. And the other hand, plant-wide climatic changes also took a heavy toll on these societies and their local environments. Societies at the core centers responded in their own ways to the environmental challenges brought about by the

cosmic, planetary and regional perturbations. Agrarian, urban and imperial modes of existence were responses directly linked to wider planetary climatic changes. We also observe that it was an epoch that saw an increase in the level of human violence and wars.[45] Scholars on ancient history have not explained sufficiently what caused this increase in human violence and evil. Were the radical cataclysmic geoclimatological events since the dawn of Holocene epoch and their resonance in the local bioregional niches at the core centers one of the causes for an increase in human violence? On the other hand, we also find the ancient human societies taking control of their destinies in relation to the changes they confronted in their local bioregions. They were rapidly adapting to the changes in the environment. In so doing, they crossed from one threshold to the other in quick succession. And this prompted the flowering of human ingenuity, imagination, creativity and inventions. Every human crossing of thresholds -- from primal to imperial epochs -- could therefore be seen partly as a response to larger geo-climatalogical events that had repercussions in the local biological niches.

Humans crossed the first threshold during the early Holocene phase. This epoch turned out to be crucial for the evolution of human societies as agricultural and pastoral ways of subsistence replaced hunting-gathering all across the core centers. Societies at the core centers made rapid transitions from nomadic hunting-gathering to semi-sedentary, sedentary and agrarian modes of subsistence. The epochs span approximately five millennia from 10,000 to 5000 B.C.E. The extreme wet period of the protocratic phase -- between 10,000 and 7000 B.C.E. -- was conducive to lush growth of vegetation. The deserts bloomed. Woodlands and savanna grasslands covered much of the present-

day desert regions around the globe. A transition to warm and wet conditions encouraged wadi activities all throughout the core regions. In the Levant, population was dense and increasingly many settlements came to subsist on farming.

The global climatic changes forced humans to stumble upon the domestication of plants and animals.[46] The moist and warm-humid conditions made humans try out rain-fed agriculture. Some form of ho-culture -- digging a hole with a stick and planting seeds -- must have preceded agriculture. The agricultural revolution began initially as a rain-fed wadi activity and quickly spread to other parts of northern Mesopotamia. As we noted, the Negev, Sinai and Arabian regions that are presently deserts had substantial human settlements. Evidences of many human settlements away from the river basins are also found throughout such deserts as the Sahara and Thar (in India). For nearly four millennia (from 10,000 to 6000 B.C.E.), agricultural strategies did not depend on river-water hydraulic strategies. Strangely though, the major rivers in these regions seemed to have played very little role in the evolution of human societies at this time. River regions had very little to do with the transition from hunting-gathering to domestication of plants and animals. The rivers were used mainly for fishing.[47] Frequent flooding of rivers and swamp conditions in these regions made human settlements near the rivers precarious. On the other hand, archaic societies also continued to hunt and forage. The abundance of flora and fauna made possible by the lush vegetation all across the region made this one of the best periods for human existence.

The second threshold crossing occurred when the first cities were built. This again was a response to larger environmental dynamics -- the desertification and desiccation

due to variation in the planet-wide weather patterns that had a severe impact on the regions of Levant and the Fertile Crescent. Ironically, the planetary perturbations of the mid-Holocene (from ca. 7000 B.C.E.) were rather harsh on the archaic settlements. The term 'desertification' is a captious term in the environmentalist's vocabulary, because much of the desertification that occurs presently is attributed to human callousness. The desertification that occurred at the core centers during the mid-Holocene was quite different from what occurs today. It was a terrestrial response to a unique planetary event that was caused by geoclimatological dynamics. The desertification that occurred as a result of changes in climate needs therefore to be looked at with the lenses of an Earth scientist rather than an environmentalist.

The desertification at the core regions, although environmentally destructive, was a major stimulus for the evolution of ancient urban civilizations along the Nile, Euphrates, Tigris, Indus, and Yellow rivers. The advance of deserts forced more and more groups to give up rain-fed agriculture and hunting-gathering, and adopt irrigation farming and pastoral modes of subsistence. The scanty rainfall forced the scattered communities to move closer and closer to waterholes, riverbanks and deltas.[48] The fertile topsoil at the river deltas invited the adoption of farming all across the river plains. Archaic societies were forced to invent hydraulic agriculture using the river waters. Many crops with bountiful harvests were easily harvested leading to surplus food stocks.

Concentration of population around riverbanks and canals led to the gradual emergence of cities. It encouraged a pattern of crowding in the towns and cities. Food surplus encouraged increase in population -- increase through higher fertility among

settled agrarian communities as well as a growing number of peoples migrating from drought prone arid regions. The scanty rainfall at the headwaters forced tribes from the upper regions to migrate to lower river basins. Migration of Hassunans, Samarrans and Halafians into southern Mesopotamian plains and of Hebrew tribes into Egypt during the time of famine are cases in point.

Early cities were built around cultic sites -- temples and shrines. Temples became the organizing centers of power as they came to acquire and own extensive farmlands and employ large amounts of farm labor. The temples became powerful social institutions and the priests and priestesses wielded enormous power. Food surplus released many people to take up other professions and thus advance human culture, making urban societies prosperous. While the cities continued to grow prosperous, deserts advanced. Increasing numbers of the semi-nomadic tribes and pastoral societies from drought-prone regions sought to assault, plunder and pillage the food stocks and resources of the cities and farming towns. Cities were forced to erect defensive walls, build watchtowers and raise standing armies. The security needs of the city-states necessitated restructuring the society hierarchically with common people subjugated to serve the bureaucrats and the rich. The temples and their power structures could not take care of the security needs of the cities. Warlords, bureaucrats, and military establishments emerged and organized the society hierarchically. Social power vested in temples was usurped by the emerging secular powers. Warrior-kings established themselves as the organizing power of the ancient cities.

The cities prospered so long as the soil remained fertile, and the water channels were unclogged. However, when the soil fertility declined with salination, the land-based economy could no longer assure the prosperity and the power of the cities. The agrarian economy of the desert region was vulnerable to all sorts of environmental vagaries. Increased aridity, desertification, desiccation, population density, deterioration of soil fertility, salination, drought, flooding and the collapse of the hydraulic irrigation systems -- all of this together spelt doom to the ancient cities. Humans were also equally responsible for intensifying these crises. To survive, cities had to gain access to resources in other areas. It is then that we begin to witness the human crossing into the next threshold -- imperialism, a third social paradigm, which induced human negativity towards nature as one central motif.

Notes

Chapter 3

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32 Martin Claussen et al., "Simulation of an Abrupt Change in Saharan Vegetation in the Mid-Holocene" Geophysical Research Letters ~~Vol.~~ 26, No. 14, ~~July 15,~~ 1999): 2037-2040.

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CHAPTER 4

Primal Societies and the Environment

The combination of climate change and the urbanization that responded to it in several parts of the world led to the degradation of the environment of many ancient cities. This degradation extended to larger and larger areas generating also a profound alienation from nature. It was in this context that the axial thinkers arose. The events that preceded the axial age -- the widespread ecological crisis caused by (a) the global climatic changes, which (b) nudged humans to domesticate nature, (c) the population increase and (d) the high-impact agrarian and urbanizing occupations of the pre-axial communities -- are important for understanding not only the essential negativity of the axial communities toward nature but even the entire history.

In Chapter 3, we showed that major changes in the Earth's climate have occurred during the period of human habitation and even in historical times. In this chapter and the two that follow, we will see how these changes after the last Ice Age affected human behavior and brought about urbanization. This chapter examines the economy of human beings during most of this history – their life as hunters and gatherers. Because our interest is in later developments, this chapter will emphasize those hunting and gathering societies that led the way in domesticating plants and animals. Chapter 5 will discuss the shift to agriculture and herding. Chapter 6 will treat the rise of cities and later of empires. It was during the imperial period that the axial revolution came to a full maturity.

Anthropologists attempt to classify human societies into categories that have some measure of scientific precision. Although there is no definite standard for categorizing, a commonly employed method is to define societies with regard to the size of the population and the sum total of the energy and materials from the environment as well as from other societies appropriated for subsistence.[1] To this accepted norm, we should also add consideration of their subsistence strategies. These may depend on food procurement (hunting, fishing and foraging), food production (farming), domination (living on the surplus food and goods produced by others), looting and raiding, trade, industrialization, colonization and military conquests.

The smallest indigenous societies consist of thirty to fifty people living together at a permanent or semipermanent settlement. These may be referred to as *band* societies. *Band* societies are highly mobile and generally subsist by hunting and gathering. The social structure of the group is egalitarian and decisions are made by group consensus. There is no accumulation of food and no personal possessions. There is no sense of exclusive right over land and resources. On occasions, several of these bands may gather together for larger communal events lasting several days. Once the events conclude, the gathering breaks up and the bands move on to their own settlements. These loosely associated bands make up the whole society. The primal societies and the many contemporary hunting-gathering bands found in the remote pockets of the globe fall within this category. In this study, we employ the term *primal societies* to refer to hunting and gathering bands who survived for millennia preceding the rise of preaxial

italics alone are sufficient here - quote marks would apply to terms used by a source

farming communities.

The next level of societies are *tribes* made up of villages with a few hundred people to small towns with a few thousand. Marshall Sahlins describes tribes as collections of interrelated bands existing for controlling competition for scarce resources, particularly land made valuable by the advent of farming.[2] *Tribes* have a stronger sense of community – stronger than bands -- and distinct territorial boundaries. The *tribes* share a common language and culture and are linked by informal alliances or a formally organized hierarchy of chieftains. Societies of this kind mainly live off agricultural and pastoral occupations and trades that provide the necessary tools and crafts for farming. Many of these farming societies are self-sufficient and trade farm produce, goods and skills within their societies as well as with the neighboring societies. Today, indigenous societies of this kind exist mostly in the rural areas of the developing countries.

In the next chapter, we focus attention on the ancient agrarian communities of the neolithic epoch, beginning in 10,000 B.C.E. which lasted for almost five millennia. Initially, the adoption of archaic agricultural practices gave rise to these societies in different parts of the world almost at the same time. These societies subsist by agricultural and pastoral occupations as opposed to the hunting and gathering way of life. Lewis Mumford and John Cobb both employ the term "archaic societies" to refer to the neolithic farming and herding communities.[3]

At the next level of societies, we find what anthropologists refer to as the "Ancient High Civilizations." These are essentially urban civilizations with many thousands or

hundreds of thousands of individuals. Societies of this kind invariably consist of dominant urban centers containing centralized religious, administrative and military structures. The societies come to be hierarchically organized with the ruling class and their auxiliaries living on the labors of the common people engaged in farming and other trades. Peoples in these societies may no longer share a common language or culture. Yet they are either unified voluntarily or collectivized, often by brute force. Ancient urban civilizations were city-states. Many of them rose and collapsed during the later part of the first millennium B.C.E. The ancient urban civilizations depended on the surrounding agrarian economy. But when this ceased to suffice their continuation also depended to a large extent on the periodic raiding and pillaging of neighboring territories, forcing their agrarian economies into subservience to the needs of their urban elites and the ruling class.

Other identifiable types of large societies -- nation states and empires -- emerged on the heels of the rise and fall of these ancient high civilizations. Imperial superstructures are imposed on smaller city-states and nation-states. Empires essentially survive on military conquests, domination, colonization and international trade. But by their very nature, empires fail to last long and collapse quickly under their own weight, while the national and ethnic units break away and seek independence.

A general comparison of these societies -- their modes of evolution and worldviews -- shows something ironic in the human attitudes not only toward the immediate environment but also toward those previous cultures from which these societies evolved

while adapting to new modes of living. Although new forms of societies emerge, old forms continue to survive side by side with them and, in some cases, outlast the emerging new ones. Older cultures are marginalized, absorbed or dominated by the emerging ones. Emerging new cultures tend to show disgust, contempt, aversion and often violence toward earlier societies. We find a classic example of this in the way modern people view primal societies. As Paul Shepard says, "For ten millennia there has been organized aggression against hunters, who themselves had no tradition of war or organized armies."[4] Today we see this aggression directed against hunting-gathering groups in the remote pockets of Asia, Africa, South and Central America and Australia. The evolution of human cultures follows a linear trajectory -- primal societies give way to archaic agrarian societies, archaic agrarian societies to city-states, and these to sovereign nations and empires. The odd thing about this is that the new societies never revert to old ways of living, although adopting new modes of living has visited them with horrendous social and ecological disruption.

It might seem difficult to explain why archaic agriculture, in spite of its many drawbacks, was firmly established and continues to spread. As Marshal Sahlins pointed out, the primal hunting and foraging way of life required less time and effort.[5] It provided access to a wide range of animal and plant food, thus reducing the reliance on any one plant or animal item. In comparison, domestication of plants and animals required far more effort, and yet it could not provide more nutritious food than could be obtained through hunting and foraging, nor could it guarantee safety against failures.[6] In spite of

the ominous social and ecological prospects of agricultural and herding practices, archaic societies opted for new modes of living -- advancing toward ancient urban civilizations, which turned out to be more calamitous than the societies from which they evolved. To them, as well as for modern people, old ways of life appear abominable. Although this may be an unsolved riddle to traditional historians, to Green Historians and Anthropologists the answer seems simple and obvious. The burgeoning human population and the limits of land and natural resources prevent human societies from returning to old ways of life. The hunter-gatherer lifestyle requires more land per person. The modern world is too densely populated for us to return to hunting and gathering as a way of life.

The age of ecology has kindled interest in identifying societies that practice eco-sensible ways of living in the world. Eco-sensible ways of living ensure the long-term health, creativity and happiness of human societies within a given world. In the introduction, we sought to identify societies that could provide the models for an ideal human-world existence. Scholars who search for an ideal human-world existence draw our attention to hunting-gathering societies. They assert that ecologically primal societies lived more sensibly than any other society anytime in human history. Scholars making those claims usually base their views on their observation of the few contemporary hunting and gathering societies in the remote pockets of the world. Numerous studies on the remaining hunting and gathering groups, such as the Bushmen of southwest Africa, Native Americans, Aborigines of Australia, Aucca Indians of the Amazon forests,

Pygmies of the Congo Forests and south Pacific Islanders, also provide us fairly extensive knowledge as to how the prehistoric hunter-gatherers have lived and survived. As far as we can tell, many of these societies have continued to survive for generations without any significant changes in their mode of living from prehistoric times. We also learn a great deal about the prehistoric hunter-gatherers from paleontology and archeology. For example, the cave paintings, tools and artifacts found in more than two hundred caves similar to the famous Lascaux cave in southwest France tell us a great deal about the hunting and gathering groups of the tundra regions of Europe during the Ice Age.[7]

Savannas and the Evolution of Human Society

Most readings on primal hunting-gathering people portray them uniformly as though primal groups all over the world were alike with respect to the modes of human-world relations, irrespective of the bioregions within which they found themselves. These generalizations are based on observations of the food procuring strategies -- strategies of hunting and gathering. Such generalizations fail to account for local variations in the topography, bio-regions, modes of living, cultures, worldviews and the nuances in the composition of their food and diet across various groups in diverse bioregions. Some attempt at categorization can help us understand the variations in human-world dynamics of primal societies.

Primal societies inhabited diverse terrain with every conceivable topography --

equatorial, savanna, tropical steppe, tropical desert, maritime, continental, polar, and mountainous. For our purpose, we group all hunting-gathering societies into four broad categories on the basis of the bioregions and latitudes within which they find themselves. These categories are rather arbitrary and unrefined. The first group consists of societies that inhabit the tundra, glacial and Polar Regions, chiefly above 22 degrees latitude in the Northern Hemisphere, and in high mountain ranges, with moderate variations from cold to temperate climates. Northern Europe, northern parts of North America and Russia fall within this category. The second category consists of those who inhabit the tropics around the equator, especially the tropical rain forests of Africa, South and Central America, South East Asia and the South Pacific Islands. Warm and humid climates, copious rain, lush vegetation and numerous animals characterize these regions. The third group consists of societies in Temperate Zone. Temperate zones are characterized by vast plains and deciduous forests. Sandwiched between the temperate and the tropical zones are the societies that meander through the vast stretches of the savannas surrounding the dry deserts at the core centers. We will focus on this fourth category.

The desert regions of the present day were once covered with savannas. Savannas covered much of the deserts of North Africa and South Asia for over 5000 years since the close of the last Ice Age around 12,000 B.C.E. Savannas are characterized by patches of wooded land, grass lands with scattered shrubs and sandy plains, seasonal or scanty rain, and extreme variations in climate from season to season. Societies in these regions took the first step toward agriculture and marched toward urban civilization, leaving the rest of

the humanity to continue with hunting and gathering.

Green history informs us that every primal society marched according to the drumbeats of its respective biological niche. The pace of a primal society's march toward civilization was determined by environmental factors such as changes in the climate. Every threshold crossing was induced by a combination of factors – environmental changes effected by planetary changes as well as by humans.[8] A coarse comparison among the four geographical categories makes this quite obvious. For example, societies in the tropics -- those in the tropical rain forests -- seemed hardly to have made any advance toward civilization. They remained the way they had been for millennia. Some groups within the third category -- societies of the temperate region, especially those in Southern Europe -- were comparatively late to arrive at the threshold of agriculture, around 6000 B.C.E.,[9] while large groups of their counterparts in the glacial and polar regions continued with hunting until the dawn of the modern era. Among the savanna groups, only a handful of societies, especially those in the regions of the Eastern Mediterranean, South West Asia, Northern India, China and Mesoamerica, began the long march toward agricultural and pastoral revolution and then further advanced toward urban civilization. A few of them, such as some of the !Kung of South Africa (Namibia-Botswana) and the Aborigine of Australia, are still hunter-gatherers.

One of the interesting variations among these groups is the relative dependence on hunting or foraging, or both, for subsistence. It is obvious that there were differences in the composition of the food intake in different societies. The societies of the tundra and

temperate regions relied predominantly on hunting and less on plant food. Richard Leakey writes,

> Ice Age Europe would have looked totally different to us, both in physical aspect and in the animals that lived there. Glaciers covered Scandinavia and most of Britain, and to the south of these treeless tundra and steppe stretched endlessly, populated by huge herds of reindeers, mammoths and horses. In southern France and Spain the climate, though cold, was less grueling: summer temperatures averaged 15EC (59EF) with frosty evenings. Cliffs in the limestone hills offered shelter from the worst rigors of winter. Mammoth and reindeer lived in the south during the colder spells, and there were herds of bison, deer and wild oxen . . . . Southern Europe, during the Ice Age, was immensely rich in wildlife and yet the human population was sparse, numbering perhaps a few tens of thousands. Francois Bordes once referred to it as 'a human desert swarming with game.'[10]

In the Arctic areas, with a total lack of plant food, hunting and fishing came to be the dominant strategy of subsistence economies.[11] The Ice Age art in the Lascaux caves and the recent discovery of the 3,500 year old corpse of the Iceman on the Swiss Alps confirm Richard Leakey's thesis that the societies of the tundra and temperate regions of Northern Hemisphere subsisted predominantly by hunting. The paintings found on the walls of these caves depict predominantly game animals and very little if any of the vegetation of the region, giving credence to the conclusion that the societies of the tundra regions were predominantly carnivorous with their life and worldviews centered around game animals. The caves with paintings of animals might also have served as the cultic sites of these Paleolithic hunting societies.[12]

The societies in the tropics, especially in the rain forest, depended more on plant and less on animal food. Clive Ponting writes,

> Rainforests are remarkable not just for the quantity of life found there but also for the diversity. A typical four square mile patch of forest will contain the following species (not individuals) -- 1,500 flowering plants, 750 trees, 125 mammals, 400 birds, 100 reptiles, 60 amphibians, 150 butterflies and probably over 50,000 insects.[13]

Since the tropics are blessed with abundant sources of plant food, the societies in these regions tend to depend more on foraging plant food rather than hunting for subsistence. Unlike the other two regions, the lush vegetation -- brushes, scrubs and trees -- put severe restraints on the mobility required for chasing game animals. It is found that societies in the tropics ordinarily stay close to their campsites rather than wandering over large stretches of territory looking for game animals.

Societies in the savannas of the temperate regions depended equally on hunting and gathering and therefore turned out to be more omnivorous than overly dependent on either a carnivorous or herbivorous diet. What is interesting is that they alternate seasonally between being predominantly herbivorous or carnivorous. Antoinette Mannion writes,

> Seasonality of rainfall is one of the most important constraints on savanna ecosystems and . . . annual biomass of primary productivity varies considerably between the wet and dry seasons. Of equal significance is the presence of a diverse range of herbivorous ungulates, often reaching high populations that are also seasonal. . . . Plant resources are confined to seeds, rhizomes, and roots, i.e., mostly below ground biomass. A shift to animal biomass, obtainable from herbivores, concentrated around water-holes, would . . . provide an acceptable supplement to the meager plant resources.[14]

In regard to human cultural advance, one wonders whether the food-procurement strategies and the omnivorous diet, with the potential for alternation between being

predominantly herbivorous and being predominantly carnivorous, add any decisive advantage to savanna societies over the other two. Mannion observes, "Clearly, the food-procuring strategies necessary for survival in the savanna environment conferred advantages to certain species . . . [One must ask] whether a carnivorous or omnivorous diet conferred an advantage over a herbivorous one and if so, did it contribute to hominid success?"[15] Could the seasonality of scarcity and plenty, the alternation between a carnivorous and a herbivorous diet, and extreme variations in climate from season, to season and even between day and night, have made the savanna societies of the temperate zones more creative and contributed to the evolution of agricultural and pastoral occupations? Mannion observes that this issue demands serious inquiry and as far as we know the question is yet to be settled conclusively.

The transition from hunting and gathering to agricultural and pastoral ways of life occurred in the savanna regions of the world. The hunting-foraging way of life was universal and lasted for over one hundred thousand years. During this long epoch, it spread to every type of bioregion from arctic tundra to the tropical rainforests. Nevertheless, human history and the evolution of human culture are primarily tied to the savanna regions.[16] Humans not only evolved in the savanna regions of Africa, but by and large spread to and exploited savannas throughout the world. The human species, with bipedal locomotion and free-swinging arms, is more suited to live and survive on the savannas than in the extreme niches of rainforest, desert and tundra. The topography of the savanna is such that it allowed humans to see animals at great distances.[17]

Why do savannas hold widespread appeal to humans? They are wooded grasslands with alternating wet and dry seasons that support a rich diversity of wildlife, especially a large and often varied assemblage of herbivores, ungulate and non-ungulate, grazing and bowsing. The essential stratum of the savanna ecosystem is grass, shrubs and patches of wooded land associated with a warm continental type of climate with precipitation ranging between 500 mm and 2000 mm.

The second reason why the savanna appeals to human sensibilities is its aesthetic. The varied types of topography and vegetation, with trees, shrubs, grass and empty patches of land with ponds, lakes, rivers, and cliffs and hillocks, were more appealing than the monotony of the rainforests and the desert sand. Edward Wilson maintains that humans by and large opt for savanna regions not so much for their biological succor as for their aesthetic appeal.[18] Wilson calls this "the savanna gestalt" and adds "that given a completely free choice, people gravitate statistically toward a savanna-like environment."[19] The expression of this appeal is observed in the savanna designs closely followed in contemporary commercial landscapes. Gestalt is a unified pattern which aids us to perceive the world around in its totality. Savannas are blessed with multifarious flora and fauna and a garden-like appearance that endow them with a charm that causes humans to desire to dwell enfolded within its benevolence and providence. Thus we find that the savanna gestalt becomes the fundamental and earliest tapestry of religious worldviews since the time when humans lived as hunters and gatherers. This gestalt is carried into the neolithic agrarian mentality and held as the ideal for all cultures to follow.

We have submitted earlier that the Western religious motifs are largely sustained by savanna gestalts. The Garden of Eden where the human story begins, according to Genesis, is portrayed as a savanna-like place -- a bioregional niche rich in flora and fauna which provides an ideal environment for human life. The Shepherd's Psalm of David (Psalm 23) portrays one of the most enduring imageries of serenity and security. The essentials of this imagery underlie both the Jewish and Christian religious existence.

Thirdly, the savanna ecosystem is amenable to transformation by human manipulation. The earliest human intervention in nature was exercised in the savannas, where humans enforce their wishes upon this environment more easily than in any other regions. Throughout history, humans have subjugated savanna ecosystems, often adversely to the extent that many natural savanna regions were turned into desert lands.[20] In addition, changes in climate advanced desert frontiers, forcing humans to exert added pressure on existing savannas. Adoption of agriculture and herding have accentuated desiccation (diminishing natural precipitation) and desertification. The cutting and burning of trees for fuel wood, destruction by domestic grazing animals, and the loss of grass cover help to expose the soil to wind and water erosion and thus advance the desiccation of the drier savannas. Such desiccation and desertification are quite noticeable in parts of southwest Asia, North India, North Africa and the upper reaches of China.

Agriculture and herding emerged in the savannas - the verdant parks at the foothills of the Zagros Mountains of Mesopotamia, the Himalayan ranges in northern India and the Yellow River valley in China. As the agricultural and pastoral revolution spread and

swept across the accessible verdant parks, adjacent regions, not so savanna-like, were brought under their revolutionizing influence.

The Impact of Primal Cultures on the Environment

In revisiting the primal societies and attempting to understand the relevance of their worldviews for the age of ecology, we wish to be on guard against unduly romanticizing the hunter-gatherers as well as falling into the prejudice of favoring hunting over against foraging. Paleolithic cave paintings depicting hunted animals but devoid of plants and vegetation invariably lead to the assumption that hunting was a primary way of subsistence over foraging and therefore the prehistoric societies were primarily male-centered and that *man* was responsible for cultural sophistication. The evolutionary view of "man, the hunter-warrior" has tainted many studies in anthropology. Recent studies show that those views are not based on facts -- that primal societies were more egalitarian, with men and women equally responsible not only for subsistence activities but also for art.[21] Anthropologists, archeologists and paleontologists have documented the artifacts primal humans left behind as evidence of their presence living as hunters and gatherers. The savanna societies manipulated their environment for food procurement more than the societies of the tundra and tropics. Even in making a simple shelter to shield them from the heat and cold, they were more innovative in adapting the environment to their physical comforts. In the glacial regions, the hunters sought out caves as shelters and the people within rain forests were permanently shielded from the

heat by the canopy of trees. These two groups accepted and appropriated what was given in the environment and hardly attempted to effect changes in the environment.

One of the most dramatic and long-lasting changes the savanna societies made on the environment was by hunting animals to their extinction. During Mesolithic and early Neolithic epochs (from ca. 16,000 to 7000 B.C.E.), the primal people became efficient hunters, as they were able to make and use sophisticated tools to hunt large mammals.[22] The effect of hunting was made worse by the tendency of hunters to concentrate on selected species to the exclusion of others. A number of species became extinct around the end of the last glaciation, when climatic change and the consequential shifts in vegetation types were adversely affecting the large mammals that had inhabited the tundra of the Northern Hemisphere. Much of the species extinction -- extinction of megafaunas like ground sloth, sabre-toothed cats, giant beaver, mastodon, armadillos, woolly rhinoceros, woolly mammoth, straight-tusked elephant, giant deer, bison, and musk ox -- might have occurred due to change in climate. But there is also evidence that humans hunted some of these large animals to extinction. This phenomenon has been observed most extensively in North America, where two-thirds of the large mammal fauna disappeared from the fossil records.[23] P. S. Martin has suggested that the primal hunters of the late Pleistocene epoch were largely responsible for many of these extinctions in North America since these extinctions seem to coincide with the arrival of humans in North America. Martin calls this hypothesis "Pleistocene overkill."[24] Recent findings of the ancient campsite at Cactus Hill, Richmond, Virginia, has conclusively

dated the arrival of humans in North America around 16,000 B.C.E.[25] It is now generally agreed that such species extinctions coincided with the arrival of human beings not only in the northern hemisphere, but also elsewhere over the globe as far as New Zealand, Australia, Madagascar and South America.[26] On the other hand, as we will read in the next chapter, the disappearance of a large number of megafauna encouraged the domestication of animals and plants during Neolithic times.

The second form of ecological disruption caused by the primal hunter was the use of fire. A. M. Mannion says that the use of fire as a strategy for hunting was in extant even during the upper Paleolithic and Mesolithic periods.[27] But it was extensively used by the advanced hunter-gatherers of the neolithic. Fire was used for hunting, land clearance and communications. The use of fire in changing the environment seemed to have been more effectively employed by the savanna societies than by the societies of the tropics and the tundra regions. Fire was used to flush and chase game, and it sometimes drove entire herds over a cliff. Large-scale fires set repeatedly eventually transformed the environmental mosaic of the region. It turned the evergreen forestlands into grassland and scrub. The newly created environment encouraged grassland animals to flourish while animals living in forests were pushed away or totally eliminated. Fire alters human habitat significantly, by favoring annual plants that grow well in new ground and by increasing nutrient recycling. "Some major types of world vegetation such as the tropical savanna typical of Africa and the chaparral of Mediterranean climates are believed to have been created or at least expanded by repeated and deliberate burning."[28] Carl Sauer

and Omer Stewart believe that most of the world's grasslands were created by early humans' repeated burning of forestlands.[29]

In spite of these seemingly widespread disruptions in the ecosystems, the overall effect on the environment globally seems to have been marginal. One of the main reasons why many gathering and hunting groups were restrained from over-exploiting the available natural resources was that their numbers were small and therefore the pressure they placed on the environment was limited. Of the 58 million square miles of the Earth's total land area, less than 20 million square miles were inhabited and utilized by the ancient hunting and gathering groups prior to the advent of agriculture.[30] The best estimate for the population of the world about 10,000 years ago before the adoption of agriculture was not more than four million.[31] Despite the excesses of hunting large mammals, by all accounts, Paleolithic societies did not have much impact on the environment. During this epoch, humans lived habitually within the limits of the environment, primarily responding and adapting to it rather than manipulating or dominating it. But this Eden-like situation began to change with the advent of the advanced hunter-gatherers of Neolithic Age.

There is also evidence that primal people did try to conserve resources in the interest of maintaining subsistence over a long period. One way to conserve was by controlling the size of their bands. Limiting the size of the group was to a large extent decided by the nomadic lifestyle. The division of labor and the need to be mobile for hunting and gathering restricted the size of the group to the optimal minimum. Women played a key

role in keeping the size of the group to the minimum. Richard Leakey, who studies the !Kung people of the Kalahari desert, observes that women give birth once every three to four years.[32] The birth interval of roughly four years is a worldwide phenomenon among hunter-gatherer peoples, and it appears to be a sociological response to the physical demands of mobility. Various methods were adopted to limit the number of people to keep it in balance with the availability of food within their reach. When the group became too large, it split and one group moved to another area. Some savage methods were also adopted to limit the numbers. The people eliminated were those who could not effectively transport themselves, who were a hindrance to the movement of the band. A common method was infanticide -- killing selected categories of babies, such as twins, the handicapped and female offspring-- and geronticide -- killing old people. The frequent movements of the bands necessitated such a killing.[33]

Another way to strike a balance between the size of the population and the environment was to restrict the use of available resources in the environment through cultic exercises surrounding totems, myths and magic. Totemism is a primal way of living in the world through identification with the plants and animals believed to direct human destiny. The benevolence of the environment is affirmed and confirmed continually through ritual ceremonies, taboos and tribal magic surrounding specific animal or plant species unique to the biological niche. Totemism also was used as a medium to narrate the story of nature and the place of human beings within it. Paul Shepard argues that "plant and animal totems are not simply objects of reverence; they

serve as codes for formulating and relating the conceptual systems of nature and of culture."[34] Totem cults and Bear Ceremonies - a circumpolar cult associated with bones -- provided taboos against hunting certain species during certain times of the year or in certain areas. Some species of animals were considered taboo and were never hunted. The totems assured them of protection and their graces were constantly invoked through rituals and dances. These served to restrain over-exploitation and helped to maintain desired population levels of both humans and animals.

Closely related, myth and magic involve the accumulation and transmitting of knowledge about hunting, gathering and the environment from one generation to the other. Since primal people lived in close proximity to plants and animals, they gathered extensive knowledge about the flora and fauna of their region. They learned what types of food would be available at different places and at different times of the year. Their physical senses and perceptions were attuned to every stimulus and situation in the environment. Their language, group ceremonies and art invariably reflected their experience of the world. The knowledge acquired through direct human contact and experience of the environment was packaged into living myths and stories and was handed down from generation to generation. Primal language itself was largely mythopoeic in style and reflected the mythic world-view of the hunters and gatherers. The mythic world-view articulated the essential interrelationship and interdependence of all entities in nature, both human and nonhuman. Prehistoric hunting-gathering people felt at home in the natural world and considered their environment to be alive and

responsive to their needs.

In speaking about Totemism or primal religions or their language and art, it would not be right to read them as distinct entities. Any discussion of primal peoples' culture, art, language, religion, magic, world-views and communal life as distinct spheres of human existence or as sorted into sacred and secular, is fraught with abstruseness. For primal people, everything in the world is interconnected. Primal peoples' faith and communal existence included the presence of animals and plants. Such an interconnected worldview, encouraging an interdependent existence, was a deterrence to any undue exploitation of the world of nature.

In terms of the thesis we have proposed, namely, that the ecological crisis of the pre-axial and axial age abetted human negativity toward nature, how would we appraise the attitude and disposition of the primal hunting and gathering societies toward the environment? Could we, as do some scholars, uphold them as archetypal conservationists and good 'Green' role models?[35] What attitude or disposition – positive, negative or neutral -- primal people displayed toward the environment? For primal people, their world of existence - humans and non-humans included --was absolute. John Cobb says that in the primal people's awareness there was no duality of subject and object.[36] Primal people held that humans were extensions of the nonhuman world and vice versa. For primal mentality, nature appeared both benevolent and malevolent. Any munificence in any sphere of nature is munificence to humans and any threat to any sphere of nature was a threat to humans as well. It is this disposition toward nature that

the mythology of the Great Hunt and Totemism convey and enforce. The primal mentality was therefore guided by the principle of harmony with, rather than domination of, the natural world, and consequently the primal way of life was more affluent, stress-free and relatively healthier than that of the peoples of the succeeding epochs prior to modern industrial societies.[37]

Secondly, in comparison to medieval or modern humans, the primal peoples' disposition toward corporeal existence was one of positive valuation. One reason for this was the non-dichotomy between body and psyche. Here again, as Cobb states, the primitive mentality did not distinguish between psyche and body, so it would be imprudent on our part to think that primal people had a distinct attitude to their bodily existence, like those of the axial or modern peoples. Although we may not have the definitive word on primal disposition to the human body, we may form some reasonable hypotheses as to the place of the human body in primal consciousness. These abstractions are based on overall physical wellbeing and the way human body and energy were employed toward subsistence, leisure and rest. Although we can not go into a full discussion here on the health and welfare of the human body, we wish to draw attention to three interrelated areas of human corporeal existence: (a) general physical health, (b) quality of food and diet, and (c) the manner in which muscle power was used for subsistence labor and leisure.

In terms of general physical health, we now have substantial data gathered from archaeology, paleontology and especially, skeletal pathology.[38] The information we have

suggests that primal hunting and gathering societies seem to have fared far better than most world populations, except for those of the last century, during which modern medicine and the quality of healthcare have prevented epidemics, diseases and death and extended the span of human life.[39] A study done by J. Lawrence Angel on the upper Paleolithic hunter-gatherers of the Eastern Mediterranean region found the nutritional health of these societies excellent.[40] Adult longevity of 35 years for males and 30 years for females means fair to good general health. There was no evidence of any endemic disease. The idea that hunter-gatherer life was short is controversial. Such a statement needs to be further qualified. The average life expectancy of people in primal hunting and gathering groups was about 25 to 30 years. Very few people reached their sixties or seventies. Infant mortality was quite high in primal groups. Approximately a quarter of the infants died natural deaths in the first year of life. An average of thirty-five to fifty percent died of natural causes before they reached fifteen years of age. The average age at death among adults is also relatively low by our standards. As we had mentioned, the wellbeing of the band was maintained by limiting the size of the group by selective elimination of unwanted individuals. When we take all facts and realities into account, we may conclude with Cohen that "the smallest contemporary human societies and the earliest visible populations of prehistory nonetheless do surprisingly well if we compare them to the actual record of human history rather than to our romantic images of civilized progress."[41]

Secondly, as to the diets of the primal people of the savanna regions, we find that they

appear to be comparatively well balanced. Going by ethnographic studies on contemporary groups we find that "the protein intakes are commonly quite high, comparable to those of affluent modern groups and substantially above world averages. Protein deficiency is almost unknown in these groups, and vitamin and mineral deficiencies are rare and usually mild in comparison to rates reported from many Third World populations."[42] From time to time, hunter-gatherers do suffer starvation when natural resources fail. However, the risk of starvation is minimized by the relative freedom of hunter-gatherers to move around and find new resources. On the whole, Paleolithic people lived comfortably in the wilderness and had plenty of nourishing food. The relatively good nutrition of hunter-gatherers may further have buffered them against any infection they encountered. Because they were omnivores, hunting-gathering people could eat diverse foods. Attuned to the changing character of the location and availability of a variety of seasonal foods, hunger was and remains an exception rather than the rule.[43] There is no evidence of widespread malnutrition or death by starvation. They did not constantly live on the margin of survival. The idea that prehistoric people were savages, who labored day and night to feed themselves, is no longer accepted in scholarly circles.

Thirdly, in terms of the use of the human body, as we had mentioned earlier, physical energy was minimally used toward subsistence activities and more toward leisure and group activities. Marshal Sahlins, writing about the Aborigine in Australia, says,

> A good case can be made that hunters and gatherers work less than we do; and rather than a continuous travail, the food quest is intermittent, leisure abundant, and there is a greater amount of sleep in the daytime per capita per year than in any other condition of society.[44]

The average length of time per person per day put into the appropriation and preparation of food was four or five hours. Moreover, they do not work continuously.[45] And the remaining time was spent in leisure activities, meeting friends, ritual ceremonies, dancing and sleep. Such an Eden-like stress-free existence would indeed promote the wellbeing of the physical body. Enjoyment and harmony within the community and nature rather than domination and accumulation of material goods were the motivation for life and all physical activities in the primal societies.

There was no need to accumulate and hoard food or materials for a rainy day; neither was there a need to enslave other humans to work for oneself or for the group. People lived in the present with hardly any worry about the morrow. Sharing rather than hoarding was the common law. All needs of all members of the community were easily satisfied from within the community resources. In this mode of open sharing, there was very little need to engage in raiding, pillaging, or dominating and enslaving the neighboring tribes. Wars, which were the hallmarks of ancient urban centers, did not exist during primal times. But, the hunter-gatherer communities did have conflicts and physical confrontation both within and between clans. These conflicts may have been triggered by the encroachment on the hunting turf by the neighboring tribes. Although, there is evidence for violence, these did not evolve into full-scale wars. The cave paintings in France belonging to the late Paleolithic age (35,000 to 12,000 B.C.E.) show no evidence of warfare. According to Arther Ferrill, a scholar on ancient warfare, there is "very little evidence of warfare or of advances in weapons technology" in these

paintings.[46] Besides, conflicts in Paleolithic hunter-gathering societies had nothing to do with the subsistence economy since there was neither booty to be won nor territory to be guarded and no central authority to organize an army. Any conflict was likely to be fleeting. Group conflict was resolved by the band splitting and dispersing into different territories.[47]

The absence of wars in primal societies tells us something about the fundamental nature of human-world relations that existed in this epoch. Since these societies lived within the confines of their bioregions, their ways of life reflected the actual process by which nature itself was constituted and functioned. Ultimately, all elements and species in nature function through cooperation rather than through competition. Every species is dependent on the other. The diverse animal and plant populations in an ecosystem can only be kept in healthy and life-giving balance by interdependency, rather than by the competition of nature "red in tooth and claw." Of course, there is predation in nature, but it is necessary to sustain the total life of a biotic community.[48] Biologists like Lynn Margulis and James Lovelock see nature as a living organism of complex interdependencies and biofeedback, linking biota and its "environment" of soil, air, and water. Competition that causes one side to be wiped out will eventually destroy the other side and cause the ultimate collapse of the total system.[49] For primal societies, living within the limits of nature and living in peace with the neighboring tribes were paramount for their survival. And for this reason organized violence served no useful purpose in the primal epochs.

What were primal peoples' dispositions toward women and what status did women have in primal societies? The status of women in the primal society was unparalleled at any other time in human history. We have alluded to the fact that the food procurement strategy depended more on the sustained foraging activities of the women than on the sporadic hunting of the men. Women provided more than half the food needs of the band. This fact alone gave women a somewhat elevated status in the community. Paul Shepard says,

> At first glance it may seem that post-hunting societies rescued women from an unfair and unequal status, but such is not the case. In hunter-gatherer cultures the women were relatively free from large families, slave-like labor, and lackey status; farming was a lifelong commitment to toil and drudgery in which the wife became part of a taxpayer's property.[50]

Unlike some societies in modern times, women of the primal societies seem to have enjoyed a place of honor equal to that of males. Women had economic prestige and political power, a situation denied to many women in the civilized world. This does not mean that women ruled over men or that there was matriarchal domination akin to the patriarchy that came to characterize the ancient urban civilizations. Many primal societies were known to have been matrilineal (the family descent traced through the mother) and matrilocal, where the husband came to live with the wife's family and tribe. But they were not matriarchal if that means dominated by women. The power structures in primal societies were evidently based on egalitarian relationships, partnership and cooperation rather than competition and hierarchy.[51]

Societies in the savannas seem to have had the best of both worlds -- the plant and

animal worlds. However, it needs to be pointed out that the savanna societies, although omnivorous, depended predominantly on a herbivorous diet and thus adopted foraging as their primary means of subsistence. A study made of a contemporary hunting-gathering band -- !Kung Bushmen of the Botswana region -- found that hunting was sporadic and provided little of dietary needs of the Bushmen. Despite a low annual rainfall (6 to 10 inches), plant food was both varied and abundant – particularly the energy-rich mangetti nut, "so abundant that millions of the nuts rotted on the ground each year for want of picking."[52]

The fact that the primal people of the savanna regions were sustained largely by a herbivorous diet speaks of the importance of women in the hunting and gathering societies. Hunting and gathering occupations introduce a division of labor between males and females. While males concentrate on hunting, women concentrate on gathering. Richard Leakey writes,

> In virtually all hunting-gathering societies, it is the women who do most of the gathering of plant foods, while the men do most of the hunting. There is sexual division of labor. The most obvious reason for this arrangement is the incompatibility between the demands of the hunt -- the long distances traveled while tracking prey and the quiet and stealth that is critical during the final stalk -- and the problems involved in carrying weighty and noisy infants.[53]

We find that the band's food requirements were largely met through the women's proficiency in foraging plant food for the group rather than by the men's capacity for hunting. The profound differences in returns between hunting and gathering makes the role of females for the group more important. "A woman can gather in

one day enough food for her family for three days, and she seldom fails. A man may bring down a large animal that will feed the band for several weeks, or he may come home with only a small springhare. Often he returns empty-handed."[54] This affects the labor distribution between women and men. Early gathering and hunting societies in savanna regions were primarily dependent on the gathering potential of women rather than the hunting prowess of men.

Studies done on contemporary hunting gathering groups in Africa and Australia attest to the ease with which primal people obtained food sufficient to feed the whole band. Women and men devote about the same amount of time overall to obtaining food, but women bring in about twice as much food as the men. Collecting nuts, fruits and roots is a reliable and a steady source of food throughout the year. Besides, these food items contain five to ten times the amount of calories and protein of an equivalent amount of meat. In the equatorial and tropical areas, hunting rarely contributes more than a third of a group's diet. In the tropics, both males and females devote time and energy foraging plant food. It is only in the arctic areas, with a total lack of plant food that hunting dominates.[55] Both in the tundra and tropics the division of labor between males and females is not as pronounced as in savannas of the temperate regions, since both engage either in hunting or foraging as the case may be. Nevertheless, the fact that the primal people of the temperate regions depended more on gathering and less on hunting underscores the immense importance of women in primal societies, especially in the savanna regions.

An indication that women fared better in primal societies than later times is the central religious symbol, Magna Mater, common to all hunting and gathering societies. The Great Mother was represented in the Venus figurines, which have been unearthed in many Paleolithic sites all over Europe and Asia. These Venus figurines -- broad hipped, pregnant with protruding vagina -- emphasize the power of woman for giving birth and sustaining life.[56] These attest to our ancestors' awe of the mystery of life and death. The Great Mother image must be distinguished from the Earth Mother of the fertility cults of the ancient agricultural societies. Unlike the Earth Mother who stands in a hierarchy above the rest of creation, or on a par with or as a rival to a Sky God, the Great Mother is not a Supreme Being, hierarchically set over other entities. She embodies herself in every species and unconditionally embraces all her offspring, both animate and inanimate. Mountains, clouds, rain, thunder, rivers, plants, animals and humans all emanate from her womb. She is neither sacred nor secular. Ancient Greeks called her *Gaia.*[57] She is a unifying and central symbol for all hunter mythologies. Metaphorically Magna Mater binds all life together in a benevolent and harmonious cycle of life, death, and birth. The metaphor depicts a mother birthing and nurturing the young through her mysterious powers of menstruation, gestation and lactation. She graces every entity and experience and nothing in this universe is trivial in her sight. She animates all living and nonliving beings and she offers herself as an abiding home for all to exist and live in harmony.

> There is reason (given the pervasive geographical distribution of Paleolithic Venus figurines) to think of the Magna Mater as a more ancient metaphor than that of the Earth Mother, and thus to distinguish the Great Mother of the Paleolithic from the Earth Mother of the

> Neolithic. Whereas the Magna Mater mythology suggests a nurturing, even biocentric relation between nature and humanity, rather than the homocentric relation of the later agrarian mind, the Paleolithic idea of nature as feminine undoubtedly contained the seed of the Neolithic Earth Mother metaphor.[58]

Riane Eisler writes,

> It would seem only logical that the visible dimorphism or difference in form, between the two halves of humanity had a profound effect on Paleolithic systems of belief. And it would seem equally logical that the fact that both human and animal life is generated from the female body and that, like the seasons and the moon, woman's body also goes through cycles led our ancestors to see the life-giving and sustaining powers of the world in female, rather than male, form.[59]

Obviously, for a feminine metaphor to come to play such an overarching role in the consciousness and destiny of the primal people, the experience of the feminine in the primal societies must have been quite positive and constructive. Unlike the axial societies, which opted for patriarchal motifs and metaphors, primal societies to a large extent lived in the benevolence of feminine grace. By all accounts, women of primal societies seemed to have played collectively a far greater role in the economy, social life and culture than any time in human history.

The process of replacing the Great Mother actually began with the dawn of archaic agrarian and urban societies. She was dethroned and slowly recast as Mother Earth with a cohort of male Sky God, who during axial times completely subdued Mother Earth to seat himself as all supreme.

Primal peoples' worldview was an organic one which viewed the whole universe as whole and absolute and every entity in nature as vitally important, necessary and equal.

To the hunters and gatherers nature was the source of life and home. Nature was intrinsically feminine and alive. They believed that the animals and plants were endowed with spirits and consciousness and power to help or hurt. Such a belief served as a restraint against undue exploitation of the environment and helped to maintain the delicate balance between humans and the ecosystem within which they lived.[60] For them, the divine appeared essentially in natural forms. Their eternity was enfolded in their mythic presence. Since their welfare depended on the success of the hunt and the bounty of the vegetation, they developed rituals to assure this. Such rituals and sacred dances reflected the powers and processes of nature and sought to propitiate the spirit of the animals they hunted regularly. On the whole, the hunters hunted and carried to the camps only what they needed. It was a need- and not greed-based activity. There were of course exceptions to this general rule like the "Pleistocene overkill" that wiped away great herds of bison and other megafauna in North America. Nevertheless, these must be considered excesses born out of ignorance and avarice.

Summary

Thus we submit that the hunting-gathering culture was better adapted to the ecological realities of living within the sustainable limits of the environment -- far better adjusted to the world than the advanced industrial culture. Primal culture existed in some form for over one hundred thousand years, and the small human population distributed sparsely across the prehistoric world caused minimal environmental damage. There were of course losses of some animal species, especially those few species of megafauna. And

some of these losses can be attributed to the mindless hunting strategies pursued by the prehistoric societies. The practice of Totemism could also not prevent the loss of these large game animals. Nevertheless, the overall impact of humans on the environment was minimal as hunting and gathering way of life was limited by the constraints of the bioregions. Cooperation, rather than competition, was the norm. Harmony with, rather than exploitation of, the natural world was the guiding principle for these societies. Integrity, stability and beauty were the hallmarks of the Paleolithic hunting-gathering cultures. Rituals designed to maintain the cosmic order were central to such a belief system. Primal people identified themselves with all of the creation as children of a common ancestry under the grace of the Magna Mater. In the final analysis, the primal existence without a doubt was better, more enduring, and one that caused less damage to natural ecosystems than those found in any other epochs. Nevertheless, the Magna Mater who reigned supreme for millennia was easily usurped by a feeble Earth Mother in consort with an overbearing male deity during the succeeding epochs of archaic agrarian and urban revolutions. How did this come about? Finding the answer to this question is the task that is ahead of us.

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CHAPTER 5

Archaic Agrarian and Herding Societies and Their Impact on the Environment

This study attempts to show the impact of preaxial societies on the environment and the ecology crisis of that age as well as the impact of the ecology crisis on the religious formulations of axial religions. What is referred to here as the preaxial epoch spans approximately eight to ten thousand years before 1,000 B.C.E. -- from the onset of the agricultural and pastoral revolution during Neolithic times to the millennia when ancient high civilizations and city-states flourished and waned, to the advent of the imperial expansions witnessed in south-west Asia and later in the Mediterranean world. The beginnings of the axial epoch may be traced to the disintegration of the urban-dominated agrarian economies around the eastern Mediterranean world. The socio-political, economic and ecological ethos of the millennia following the collapse of high civilizations and the rise of imperialism were the fermenting grounds for the emergence of the axial mentality. This chapter is devoted to the agrarian revolution, archaic societies, and their impact on the environment.

The Rise of Agriculture and Herding

Why and how did the agricultural revolution emerge? Responses to this question offered in the past lauded the agricultural-pastoral revolution as an advance over hunting

and gathering. Portraits of primal societies found in the literature of a few decades ago encouraged such distortions.[1] We have said earlier that the findings of recent research on both the primal and contemporary hunting-gathering societies have debunked those theories.[2] On the other hand, there is considerable disagreement among scholars on the causes of the origin of agriculture and herding. Since the question is yet to be settled, we refrain from taking a stand on this issue. However, we wish to draw attention to an observation made in the previous chapter. We showed that the savanna societies' engagement with the environment was more intensive and innovative than that of the societies of the tundra and tropical regions. Savanna societies were able to switch with ease from being predominantly carnivorous to being herbivorous, depending on the variations in the concentration of animal and plant populations that occurred with the change of seasons and of the regions in which they traversed. Besides, the plants and the grazing hoofed animals of the savanna regions were more amenable to domestication than those found in other regions.[3] The variations in subsistence strategy from season to season -- alternating between omnivorous, herbivorous and carnivorous diets -- and in the relative modes of engagement with the environment's flora and fauna[4] amenable for domestication nudged the wandering humans in the savannas in and around the present-day desert regions toward novel ways of engaging with the environment. This gave them an edge over other societies -- societies in tropical, tundra and temperate regions – and helped them make an early transition to agricultural and pastoral ways of life. They did not set out to invent an agriculture or a pastoral way of life *per se* or "joyfully leap into

farming."[5] Rather a series of marginal changes made in the hunting and gathering ways of life in response to the savanna ethos prompted a slow transition.

On the other hand, external factors such as climatalogical and environmental change and serendipity were equally responsible for the evolution of neolithic cultures. The early Holocene phase (10,000 to 7000 B.C.E.) was a period when the Northern Hemisphere underwent a resurgence of warm and wet weather conditions. Ice sheets retreated. With the arrival of copious rain and warm weather conditions, the savanna and the deserts regions bloomed again. Vegetation and prairies covered most of the desert regions of North Africa, Arabia and the Levant. People continued to hunt, but along with hunting, they gradually began to domesticate plants and animals that provided them with a more dependable source of food, clothing and shelter.

Nevertheless, the agricultural revolution may also have been hastened by population pressure, brought about either by an increase in the numbers of the group or a decrease in the game animals in particular regions.[6] When the resource base of particular game and plant food diminished (due to change in climate, retreating forests, spread of grass lands and deserts), the primal societies of these regions were forced to exert more pressure on the environment and find ways of obtaining a more dependable supply of food from within the territories. A. M. Mannion says, "Mobility was reduced as hunting territories were reduced, paving the way for a more sedentary existence. Continued population growth, which is more characteristic of sedentary rather than a mobile life-style, and the enhanced pressure on natural resources, could well have stimulated added plant and

animal domestication to ensure adequate food supplies."[7]

Late Mesolithic and Neolithic groups, especially those in the savanna regions, increasingly directed their efforts toward exploiting existing territories more intensively in ways that would ensure a dependable supply of plant and animal food. One expression of this intensive engagement with the environment was the foraging of plants and other resources hitherto considered unacceptable, uneconomical to obtain, or difficult to process. With the advent of the Holocene period came the warmer climate and copious rain that caused considerable changes in the topography with floral and faunal changes. Big game animals retreated or disappeared from the savannas at the core centers. With the growing disappearance of big game animals, small animals were hunted.[8] Plants became increasingly important in the human diet. Cereals and grains were earnestly foraged. This spurred the manufacture of special tools -- grindstones, pottery etc. -- for processing and preparing food for consumption.[9] The increase in population also required taking into account and dealing with the natural fluctuations in the daily, seasonal, and annual availability of food. The amount of food available to each member of the group during the prosperous as well as the leaner times largely determined the size of the population in archaic societies. Thus to feed the growing population, societies had to devise ways and means to store food for lean seasons. Pottery was probably invented initially to store food. The need to store food for a growing population may also have furthered sedentism.[10] But the most important strategy furthered by population pressure was the shift from food procurement to food producing.[11]

Through all these developments, what is not clear is whether the domestication of plants or animals came first. What is clear of course is that both required some form of sedentary existence. We see evidences of these in the agrarian settlements scattered all across the headwater regions of Euphrates and Tigris in Northern Mesopotamia. It is generally agreed that the dog was the first animal domesticated. Domestication of dogs occurred around 12,000 B.C.E. in the Near East.[12] Available evidence shows that it was domesticated not to add to the human diet, but to aid humans in hunting and to be a companion to humans. This was followed by the domestication of sheep, goats, pigs and cattle during the early Holocene epoch between 10,000 and 8,000 B.C.E.[13]

During the initial phase, there was a great deal of continuity between the primal hunting-gathering modes of existence and the emerging agrarian and herding practices. To start with, the tools and the artifacts made and used for the respective food procuring strategies were more or less similar.[14] Mannion maintains that

> the basis of food procurement strategies were already present in indigenous mesolithic populations and it would not have required such a massive change in society . . . to incorporate the new resources that characterize neolithic agriculture.[15]

Agriculture began as hoe culture -- digging a hole with a stick and placing roots and tubers to grow selected favorite food plants.[16] The tools used in hoe culture were the same as those used in hunting and foraging and therefore no particular craft was needed to advance hoe culture. The forest overgrowth was cleared and burned and tubers and seeds were planted. Gradually, neolithic humans began to cultivate the basic food plants such as wheat, barley, peas, lentils, rice, corn and potatoes.

A switch to permanent agrarian settlements from nomadic hunting and gathering modes of living took three to four thousand years to mature during the late Mesolithic period. Agricultural settlements are observed during the early Holocene phase around 10,000 B.C.E. These settlements may have emerged even before the days of Younger Dryas (11,000 to 10,000 B.C.E.) at the close of Post-Glacial (Cryocratic) Phase (15,000 to 11,000 B.C.E.). With the retreat of ice sheets, and with the advent of the Holocene age, the Northern Hemisphere became wetter.[17] It was a period that witnessed moist conditions that made both the Saharan and Southwest Asian deserts into vast savanna regions with patches of woodland. The wet condition of the post-Glacial period was an impetus for intense wadi activities, especially around the water holes in otherwise arid regions.[18] Some primitive form of hoe-culture must have emerged around these water holes, which eventually led to the rise of agriculture.

It is generally believed that the first site at which the transition from hunting and gathering to an agricultural and pastoral way of life occurred was in the foothills of Zagor Mountains in Northern Mesopotamia between 10,000 to 9,000 B.C.E.[19] The region had long been occupied by primal hunting and gathering groups. Excavations done at Jarmo, a little village in the foothills of the Zagros Mountains, show that it had fully adopted to agrarian way of life by ca. 7500 B.C:E.[20] But the gradual transition to the agrarian way of life began much earlier. Jarmo consisted of about twenty-five households. People of the village practiced dry farming and cultivated barley, emmer, lentils, chickpeas and peas. In addition, they had domesticated sheep and goats. To supplement the diet, Jarmo

villagers hunted such animals as gazelle and onager and foraged a wide variety of wild plants. Eventually most of the food of the Jarmo villagers came to be obtained through agriculture and herding rather than by hunting and foraging. By the time the village had become permanent and fully functional, less than ten per cent of the food was obtained through hunting and foraging.[21] Small-scale agricultural-herding settlements like Jarmo village began to dot the foothills of the Zagros Mountains.

Another site that experienced a similar transition to agriculture was Çatal-Hüyük in Turkey. It was perhaps the first permanent settlement in the Mediterranean world, dating from 8400 B.C.E.[22] The village was situated at the foot of a mountain range. The annual melting of snow on the ranges ran down the hills and replenished fields with silt and nutrients, thus ensuring the fertility of the land. Archaeologists have found the remains of several similar villages in this region.[23] Some of these agrarian settlements had two to five hundred people.

But the dry farming and the rain-fed agriculture practiced at these settlements had its limitations. With the declining rainfall during mid-Holocene period, from about 6000 to 3000B.C.E., a more dependable form of agriculture had to be developed. Thus, hydraulic agriculture slowly gained favor over dry farming and hoe culture. Small-scale river-based agrarian settlements gradually came into existence and spread along the banks of the Euphrates and the Tigris.

Ecological Impacts of the Archaic Farming and Pastoral Societies

Human ability to change and control the natural environment greatly increased with the agricultural revolution and it gradually replaced hunting and gathering as the primary means of subsistence. The transition happened over a period of time. The first farmers and herders continued to hunt and forage in addition to their new found way of life, but over a period of four to five thousand years,[24] hunting and foraging were completely given up in exchange for agriculture and herding in many regions. During the hunting and foraging stages of evolution, humans felt at one with nature and accepted nature for what it is and participated in it. But that changed with the advent of the agrarian revolution. Humans began to view themselves not as part of nature but as separate. Such a disposition encouraged them to manipulate, control and eventually dominate the environment. Adoption of agricultural and pastoral ways of life was in essence the exercise of human mastery over nature. Max Oelschlaeger writes, "Agricultural people abandon the hunt and the spear, settle in villages, and take up the hoe and shepherd's staff."[25]

The transition from hunting and foraging to an agrarian way of life had three dimensions: the transition from the nomadic to the sedentary way of life; the change from hunting to domestication of animals; and the change from foraging to domestication of plants. Each of these affected the environment and the society in its own way. No one knows which was earliest. All three appear to have occurred during the same period. Food production through the domestication of animals and plants -- planting, cultivating

and harvesting -- required a settled community, which meant that humans could no longer rove around looking for food, but had to stay in one place and care for the crops and animals. Food production -- clearing land, sowing, tending and harvesting crops and tending animals -- demanded a sedentary way of life and hard consistent manual labor.

On the face of it, a sedentary way of life and pastoralism appear to be incompatible. Pastoral societies are by and large nomadic and move from place to place with ease. But the available evidence from archaic societies shows that it was the slow evolution from nomadism to semi-permanent settlements that made domestication of animals possible in the first place.[26] Herding bands roved around the fringes of agricultural settlements and made village settlements their home base.

The emergence and spread of sedentary societies increased pressures on the environment in many ways. The overall impact of gathering and hunting groups, with their mobile way of life and low level of demand for goods, had been light comparatively. But a sedentary way of life meant that the resources for subsistence were drawn from a limited area and human efforts were directed toward increasing the supply of resources from the immediate environment. These included materials for construction and tools. Such concentrated and continuous exploitations imposed an added stress on the environment. Forests suffered most as the requirement for wood to build houses, heat homes and cook food rose steadily. In the Indus valley region houses were built with bricks baked in kilns, which required enormous amounts of wood for fuel. In China, archaic people used bamboo twigs and mud to erect the walls of their huts and houses,

resulting in the removal of natural plant cover. With the hills denuded, the water runoff became severe, causing floods in the plains, silting, water logging, salination, and decline in soil fertility.

The second effect of sedentism is an increase in population. The sedentary nature of agricultural and pastoral life brought about a marked increase in population. The archaic agrarian revolution enabled an enlarged population to live and survive in a smaller area. Increase in the population has been a hallmark of the spread of agriculture.[27] We argued above that population pressure on diminishing resources was the fundamental reason for the evolution of agricultural-pastoral cultures. Nevertheless, the primary cause of population growth has been the rise of these cultures. As shown in Chapter 4 the primal way of life served as a deterrent to population increase and kept the population within a sustainable relation to the environment. Uncontrolled population growth has been far more characteristic of the agrarian life than that of hunting and gathering societies. Max Oelschlaeger maintains that the sedentary way of life adopted by primal agrarian societies "spurred early menarche and shorter periods of lactation and it contributed to higher birth rates."[28] Population increase escalated the domestication of plants and animals and thus put more pressure on the environment.[29]

Farming families are on average considerably larger than their primal and urban counterparts.[30] This is because farmers look upon their offspring as a labor force to work the fields, and as an insurance against old age. The foundational ideology of agriculture and herding is based on the fertility of nature as well as of humans. Max Oelschlaeger

says:

> The Neolithic population explosion conceivably had more to do with the changing ideological orientation of agriculture and the method of economic production than the absolute supply of food. . . . The fertility mania of agriculture is a new ideological development.[31]

We find evidence of this in biblical dictum: "Be fruitful and multiply" used twice in the Genesis account of the creation. At the beginning of the early Holocene period, the world's population was about four million. The spread of agriculture enabled more people to be fed, and human numbers rose steadily. That figure reached 100 million at the peak of the Han and Roman at A.D. 200.[32]

The third effect of a sedentary way of life was the spread of new diseases and epidemics in archaic societies. Such epidemics were unknown to nomadic people. When humans began to live in crowded conditions with little attention to sanitation, it was easy for a disease to strike a whole community and take a heavy toll on the population. Although there was a tendency for population to increase in archaic societies, frequent epidemics slowed the growth.[33]

The domestication of plants also impacted the immediate environment. It replaced natural ecosystems with agricultural systems. Agricultural systems are artificial environments created by human intentions and interventions. The change was accomplished, first, by transforming the landscape. The process of planting, growing and harvesting plants requires the ground to be leveled, soil to be broken up, and water and nutrient supplies to be conveyed through fertilization and irrigation for the purpose of cultivating selected plants. Archaic farming involved deliberate clearing of land and

tilling the soil.

Second, agriculture brought about the clearing the natural ecosystem of all unwanted species of plant and animal life, in order to eliminate competitors and detractors -- parasites and predators that eat or destroy the crops. By clearing forests and grasslands -- removing weeds, brushes and trees that compete with crops for space and nutrients -- archaic societies created arable lands suitable for the growth of selected food plants.

Third, changing the ecosystems replaced the countless variety of natural plants covering the landscape, with a small number of species. The process of breeding and nurturing selected species of plants and animals was indeed a prototype of genetic engineering. By adopting agriculture, the first farmers and herders began to manipulate the genetic resource base. This was a first step toward developing monocultures -- systems that concentrate on one or two species of plants and animals and eliminate all others. By creating artificial systems, the plants are made to grow outside their original and native habitats. This makes the plants (as well as domesticated animals) heavily dependent on human intervention and assistance.[34] Over a period of time, the physical and genetic structures of domesticated plants and animals were substantially changed to meet the requirements of human needs and the artificial environment within which they were forced to live.[35]

Adoption of agriculture in the archaic world set in motion the beginnings of the ecological crisis. The land cleared for farming was left bare for part of the year, and this altered the energy flows -- the natural biogeochemical cycles, which are fundamental to

all healthy ecosystems.[36] The soil was exposed to the wind and rain, leading to more extensive soil erosion than encountered in natural ecosystems. Nutrient recycling processes were also disrupted since archaic agrarians had yet to learn the art of maintaining soil fertility through the use of manure and composts. Recent evidence from central Jordan suggests that as early as 6000 B.C.E., within about a thousand years of the emergence of settled communities, villages were being abandoned as soil erosion caused by deforestation resulted in a badly damaged landscape, declining crop yields and eventually inability to grow enough food.[37] Changes in the weather that occurred during the mid-Holocene period (6000 to 2000 B.C.E.) also caused the desiccation and advance of desserts and forced archaic societies to abandon settlements that depended on rain-fed agriculture. Deforested foothills where humans practiced subsistence agriculture and herding for thousand of years became desiccated, rocky, and almost denuded of useful plants.

In spite of these lethal effects, agriculture was pursued in earnest because it assured human societies dependable, regular and surplus supplies of food through all seasons. But this assurance came with a price. In comparison to the carefree nomadic modes of existence of hunting and gathering societies, agriculture and pastoral occupations exacted hard and consistent physical labor through the changing seasons of the year.

Equally destructive of the environment was the domestication of animals. Pastoral occupations developed concurrently with the hoe culture around 10,000 B.C.E. in ancient Mesopotamia. Domesticated animals like sheep, goats and cattle consume plants that are

unsuitable for human consumption and turn them into suitable food such as milk and meat, thereby extending the range of dependable food available to humans. The pastoral bands became a force for the destruction of forests and grasslands of the ancient world. Unlike the Paleolithic hunters whose impact on the environment was marginal and diffuse, the early shepherds changed their habitats in extensive ways. The farmers and the herders cleared forests, which were replaced by savanna and grasslands containing the annual plants that served as food for the flocks of animals.

One of the most environmentally destructive animals, protected from its natural predators and domesticated by the archaic people, was the goat. Goats not only browse favorite shrubs on the ground, but climb trees to eat the foliage. They nip tree seedlings and thus prevent regeneration of forests and shrubs. Although sheep and cattle are not quite so destructive, they, too, overgrazed and destroyed grasslands. Herding communities often set fires in the brush lands to stimulate the growth of grass. Unlike the farmers, tied to their land, the shepherds wandered over vast stretches of grassland and, through over-grazing, gradually turned savannas into deserts. Since the grasslands and savannas were limited and the shepherds had to return to the same fields year after year, every return became more destructive than the one before. As we showed in Chapter 3, the global climatic changes that occurred during the mid-Holocene epoch caused widespread desiccation. This was a primary cause for the advance of deserts. The pastoral societies of ancient Mesopotamia compounded the process exerting increasing pressure on vulnerable lands.[38] With the vanishing woodlands and the over-grazed

grasslands, the natural recycling process was broken. Rapid water runoff, declining water tables and erosion of topsoil contributed to recurring droughts and advancing deserts. The same scenario was repeated again and again in other core centers of the ancient world -- India, China and the Eastern Mediterranean.

Socio-cultural Impacts of the Agrarian Revolution

The transition from hunting-gathering to agricultural and pastoral ways of life initiated a thoroughgoing paradigm shift – a transformation of every area of human existence and culture, both intellectual and material, changing the way humans viewed themselves and the environment. The archaic revolution advanced human culture.[39] The advance was made possible by the availability of surplus food and stocks. Surplus food freed some people in the community from farming or herding to devise other vocations. It stimulated the creation and use of crafts and technology and created specialization of skills and labor. Groups and families within societies came to pursue different trades and occupations. The first non-farmers were probably craftsmen producing pottery, tools and other specialized items for the community. The priestly profession began with the senior members of the tribe taking up the ceremonial functions of the community. Ceremonial sites, which were initially outside the settlements, were moved to the center of the settlements.

The surplus food, stocks and services also fostered the accumulation of private property. Initially, most if not all accumulated goods and services were created for the

consumption of the community. Eventually, the domestication of plants and animals and production of crafts and goods by particular families and individuals produced a change in the perception of labor and ownership. Individuals must invest their labor well in advance of receiving any reward. The need to work and invest in resources to produce future yields and goods promoted a sense of individual ownership. Produced food became one's own personal or family property. In the words of Ponting:

> Gathering and hunting groups generally regard plants and animals not as things 'owned' by individuals but as available to all. Plants and animals are taken from the wild and there are normally strong social conventions on how food must be shared between all members of the group. Agriculture introduced the idea of ownership of food either by individuals or larger organizations. The move to growing crops in fields and the practice of herding and breeding flocks of animals opened the way to viewing the resources used and the food produced as 'property' and the far greater degree of time and effort involved compared with gathering and hunting encouraged this trend.[40]

The emergence of crafts, technology and specialization of skills and labor together with the availability of surplus food necessitated a system of exchange of goods and services within the community. People in the community were interdependent, relying on each other for subsistence and services. Since farmers had to spend a great deal of time tending to their particular crops or animals, they had to do without a variety of food items and had to develop alternate means of obtaining these additional resources. This need fostered the rudiments of primitive trade -- exchange of goods and services -- and perhaps the emergence of middlemen in ancient villages. Sedentary farmers thus tended to accumulate, store, and exchange possessions, and produce in a manner not

possible in primal societies.

The archaic agrarian revolution ushered in far-reaching changes in the way humans lived subsisted. Societies at the core centers gradually gave up the hunting-and-gathering way of life in exchange for agriculture and herding and switched from being nomadic wanderers to being sedentary settlers. A sedentary way of life meant that humans were now protected from the extremes of weather and the change of seasons. With these lifestyle changes came an increase in population. Village settlements concentrated human numbers in a smaller area. There were drastic changes in the composition of the diet and the variety of food items available for consumption as well as in the way food was processed, cooked and stored. All these changes had a profound impact on the quality of human life and the overall physical wellbeing of archaic people. One might suppose that farming and herding would have proffered an increase in the quantity and quality of nutrition and the variety of food consumed, thus enhancing overall physical health and wellbeing. Adoption of agriculture seemed to have initially proffered a dependable surplus of food. But as agriculture became widely adopted, there was a general decline in the quality and quantity of human nutrition. In comparing the nutrition of the primal and archaic societies, we find that quality and variety were sacrificed for quantity. By the time agriculture appeared on the scene, humans had hunted large mammals to extinction and they had to be content with smaller game. Besides, only a handful of species of plants and animals were domesticated and the archaic communities came increasingly to subsist on this limited number of species, unlike the numerous

varieties of plant and animal food available to primal groups. The specialized nature and narrow focus of many agricultural societies made them vulnerable to crop failure and periodic drought and starvation.

Although sedentism offered advantages for human living, it increased vulnerability to the attack of diseases and plagues. Archaic societies had not yet learnt the art of sanitation and hygiene and were, therefore, prone to the spread of many diseases. Sedentism also results in the accumulation of human wastes. Rat-borne bubonic plague was brought into human communities. There is a significant correlation between the evolution of farming economies and the incidence of malaria. Mark Cohen maintains that malaria caused more deaths in human populations than any other human disease, and that it was a direct consequence of sedentism.[41] Changes in the handling of food also spurred disease transmission. Domestication of animals increased the range of infections to which human societies were being exposed.[42] Crowding of animals in confined enclosures, spurred the spread of disease among them, just it did among human beings. Population increased because children were more closely spaced, but the probability of surviving childhood may not have improved until quite recently. Infanticide, prevalent in primal societies, was given up. There is no evidence that adult life expectancy increased with the adoption of farming, and there is some evidence to suggest that it may actually have declined.[43]

War and Violence and the Agrarian Revolution

We are not sure when and how warfare emerged in archaic societies. Scholars seem to be divided on these issues. Our readings seem to inform us about two schools of thoughts that date the rise of warfare with different epochs. Arther Ferrill seems to push for very late Paleolithic and very early Neolithic periods, between 12,000 and 8,000 B.C.E.[44] Others like Riane Eisler, Walter Wink, Marija Gimbutas and Thorkild Jacobsen maintain that organized warfare grew in the context of ancient urban civilization that spread during the mid-Holocene period from about 6,000 B.C.E. What they regard as violence, conflicts and warfare also needs further clarification. Arther Ferrill talks about warfare as an organized activity under a central command.[45] Whether such an activity was a characteristic of archaic or urban society is a question we leave to the scholars to decide. The focus of this study does not demand us to settle these debates. Nevertheless, we wish to acknowledge that violence and warfare took shape and afflicted archaic agrarian and herding societies of the Fertile Crescent.

Our study looks at these social developments in the light of Green History. The post-Glacial Period (the Cryocratic Phase), 15,000 to 11,000 B.C.E., saw rapid climatic and ecological changes on a global scale. With the waning of ice-sheets, temperatures and precipitation increased. Ecosystems with new species of flora and fauna emerged in regions that had been previously been covered in ice. With the retreat of ice sheets, and with the advent of the Holocene age, the Northern Hemisphere became wetter.[46] Amelioration of the climate and relatively moist conditions made both the Saharan and

Southwest Asian deserts into vast savanna regions with grasslands and patches of woodland.[47] It was a time of intense wadi activities, especially around the water holes in otherwise arid regions.

The planet-wide climate changes effected monumental changes in the local environments and in human societies. The flora and fauna of these regions had changed drastically from those of the last glacial period. Human societies had to devise efficient ways of hunting and find other ways of subsistence. New and efficient hunting tools were invented along with primitive forms of non-irrigated horticulture. These developments eventually led to the rise of agricultural and pastoral ways of life. Available evidence shows that during Mesolithic Age (12,000 to 8000 B.C.E.), there was a revolution in weapons technology and powerful new weapons (bow and arrow) made their first appearance.[48] Initially these weapons may have been used solely for hunting. This was a period when big game animals had vanished or retreated and humans were forced to hunt smaller animals that were swift on their feet. Hunting had to become more organized and efficient. Besides, there were periods of drought and aridity like the Younger Dryas that occurred between 11,000 and 10,000 B.C.E. Younger Dryas was a setback for the prosperous time that was in the offing. Sudden changes in the planet-wide climate drastically affected human societies, the flora and the fauna. Game animals become scarce. At this time, the tactics used for undertaking organized hunting may have been turned against rival hunting bands that competed for the same gaming turf. The agrarian settlements that had surplus food and resources came under increasing attacks

from the nomadic herders and the roving hunting bands.

As the early Holocene phase (10000 to 7000 B.C.E.) unfolded, warfare and conflicts began to escalate. We see evidence of banditry and attacks against sedentary settlements from the fortifications built for security purposes. The city of Jericho was walled as early as 8350 B.C.E. with walls ten feet thick and thirteen or more feet high. Ferrill writes:

> There was in the Near East at the beginning of the Neolithic Age a genuine burst of organized warfare. . . . Early neolithic man, to protect himself from the firepower of the new offensive weapons system, began to build fortifications. Those fortified sites are the most impressive archaeological remnants of the military explosions, revealing dramatically the impact of war on man's culture.[49]

At Çatal-Hüyük village in Turkey, the dwellings were made of contiguous houses that served as protection against attacking forces.[50] These fortifications and the contiguous dwellings were defensive in nature and reflected the increasing security needs of the early agrarian settlements.

What is obvious in these developments was that the sedentary agrarian settlements were relatively prosperous and economically well off with surplus food stock and resources. Early archaic societies enjoyed the best of both worlds -- primal and archaic modes of subsistence. Nevertheless, their sedentary existence and relative prosperity made them an easy prey for the roving bands of hunters and nomadic herders. These scattered settlements were rather small, defenseless and essentially tribal. During the early archaic times, people continued to trust the benevolence of nature. The early agrarian ideology itself continued to reflect the feminine archetype of cooperation and receptivity. Besides, early archaic societies were confronted by unlimited frontiers of

virgin wilderness and land resources. There was no need for them to go around and pillage the neighboring settlements nor was there a central authority to organize an army. And the early archaic agrarian ideology itself was devoid of economical and political rationales for war. Warfare and conflicts did not become a way of life in the early archaic societies, although roving bands of hunters and herders may have advanced them. It would not be therefore reasonable to posit that the archaic agrarians were violent and that the agricultural revolution itself caused warfare in the ancient world. Rather wars and conflicts of the early-Holocene period were caused more by the relative economic disparities that emerged between societies brought about by the agrarian revolution than by the failure of the environment or the innate human penchant for power over other human beings. In fact, the environment during the early-Holocene epoch was rejuvenating and robust. In terms of human ecology, it was one of the best periods in the history of the planet earth. Yet it was also a period that saw drastic changes in human cultural development leading to an increase in conflicts and violence.

Escalation of violence and warfare due to the failure of the environment coincided with the emergence of organized tribal confederations and chiefdoms. The advent of mid-Holocene epoch around 6000 B.C.E. brought increasing desiccation and advanced the desert frontiers. Settlements that depended on rain-fed agriculture were abandoned. Arid conditions forced scattered human settlements to move closer to river basins and water holes. Hydraulic agriculture was developed and widely adopted. It was then that we see organized warfare escalate with vengeance. Hunting tools were turned into

weapons of war. Protective walls were erected around many human settlements. People began to migrate from place to place in search of food and resources. Nomadic pastoral tribes and gangs of marauders attacked and pillaged settled agrarian communities. During the epoch of ancient high civilizations, organized and institutionalized warfare became more a way of life than an exception.

In the light of these facts, we conclude cautiously that the violence and warfare began to gain grounds when the agrarian revolution spread during the early Holocene epoch. During the mid-Holocene period warfare and violence increased and they became a way of life especially in the ancient urban societies. The widespread adoption of agrarian and pastoral ways of life and the failure of the environment during the mid-Holocene period also contributed to the escalation of violence between human societies. Notwithstanding these views, we do not play down the fact that warfare and the attending evils were not unheard of during the archaic societal evolution -- the human crossing of thresholds from primal to archaic to urban epochs. Not only warfare, but also many other ignominious social institutions like patriarchy, slavery and hierarchy, begin to show their ugly heads during archaic times. In the light of these facts, we agree with Thorkild Jacobsen, who concludes, "As far as we can judge, the fourth millennium and the ages before it had been moderately peaceful. Wars and raids were not unknown; but they were not constant and they did not dominate existence."[51]

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Religious Worldviews of Archaic Agrarian Societies

The archaic agricultural-pastoral way of life became a tenable alternative for *Homo sapiens* to the thousands of years of subsistence hunting and gathering. It radically transformed the material and ideological culture of the ancient world and the way humans viewed themselves in relation to the environment. It was one of the important turning points in the evolution of human societies. The transformation initiated a paradigm shift that affected every area of human existence. During the first few millennia of the neolithic revolution, the agrarian ideology was firmly established, and it continued to influence the ideologies of all succeeding societies. Its influence continues even to the present day.

We had mentioned earlier that the agrarian revolution was brought about by population pressure and the change of climate and topography at the core centers. The ideology of fertility motivated the domestication of animals and plants.[52] "Fertility mania" became a driving force for the widespread adoption of agriculture in the ancient world. The underlying basis of the agrarian mentality was a way of viewing the environment as a virgin storehouse of resources that could be worked upon by human ingenuity and intervention to yield a greater quantity of plant and animal food. Thus the farmer through his intentional and intensive efforts could increase the crop yields many-fold, and the herdsmen could multiply the numbers of his flocks. Since more plant and animal food could be produced through increased domestication, more humans could be sustained with the increased availability of food. And with the additional number of human beings more lands could be farmed and more cattle tended. The desirability of

increasing human population, arable lands, and cattle was a new ideological twist that the adoption of agriculture engendered. It was now believed that the primary aim of all creatures was to "be fruitful and multiply." With sparse human population and unlimited frontiers of wilderness, such a view seemed logical and desirable for human society, food production and interaction with the environment.

Commitment to the ideology of fertility came to shape and control the archaic mentality. It was sustained and expressed through the archaic agrarian and pastoral cults. Archaic peoples' commitment to this ideology was constructed on five cardinal pillars. First, nature is orderly and predictable. Archaic peoples' keen sense of observation of the process of nature made them conclude that nature performed in orderly rhythmic fashion in unending cycles of birth, growth and death. The role of humans was to actively and creatively participate in the cyclical order of regeneration. Agrarian people were sensitive to the ever-repeating changes of the seasons, the rising and setting of the sun, moon, and stars and all that happened around them. Agrarian cults essentially affirmed and encouraged the complex annual cycles of nature and all festivals and ceremonies coincided with seedtime and harvest.[53]

Such perceptions to a large measure were a legacy of primal consciousness. The understanding that "nature functions in an orderly fashion" aided them in finding ways and means of enhancing the yields of plants and animals species through selective breeding. This idea forms the basis for all faiths. Greeks, Jews and Christians believe that God created order out of chaos. Alfred North Whitehead speaks of "the rise of the

instinctive faith that there is an Order of Nature which can be traced in every detailed occurrence."[54] The sun always rises in the east and sets in the west. The seasons change on an annual basis. Seeds and tubers when planted and tended by humans grow and produce more of their kind. The belief in the fidelity of nature was the cornerstone of the archaic agrarian enterprise and cults.

Secondly, the ideology of fertility was based on the idea that nature displays some measure of duality -- contrasting and opposing forces. Nature consists of both benevolent and malevolent forces and entities. Day and night always chased and swallowed each other. Life and death defeated each other. The prey and the predator are in a constant struggle to outrun the other. Humans came to view the world as a place of competition for scarce resources. Nature was no longer a system of interdependence and cooperation. Unlike the Paleolithic mind, the Neolithic mind no longer thought of itself as the child of the *Magna Mater.* The expression of this mentality is seen in the way archaic agriculturists cleared the land of all natural vegetation for planting selected species of crops. Weeds and shrubs that competed with crops needed to be exterminated. Animals that prey upon the domesticated species needed to be hunted or scared away. The entities in nature were thus categorized in terms of what was beneficial to humans, not in terms of what was necessary for the maintenance of a healthy ecosystem. Thus desirable species of plants were cultivated as crops while undesirable plants that choked the growth of crops were weeded out.[55] The idea of material categorization of good and bad in nature was transposed into agrarian cults as ideas of sacred and profane. Archaic cults devised

elaborate schemes not only to categorize natural elements into good and evil, but also to invoke the benevolent and appease the malevolent cosmic forces. Cultic exercises were repeated over and over in an attempt to cajole nature to be benevolent rather than malevolent. Agrarian cults, rituals and festivals were not so much a celebration of the bounties of nature, but rather adjurations offered to force nature to share her wealth with humans. We do not see such distinctions of sacred and profane in primal cults. For primal people, there was no sacred or secular existence. Such a distinction did not fit the structure of primal mentality. Although the diabolic power of the scared-profane dualism was not unleashed until much later -- during urban and imperial epochs -- the seeds of this dualism were sown during archaic times.

Thirdly, due to the increasingly dualistic view of the world, archaic agrarians distanced themselves from nature and saw themselves as being above nature. They began to see nature existing for human benefit rather than for its own sake. Whereas the Paleolithic hunter-gatherers who saw themselves as an integral part of nature and as children of the Magna Mater, archaic societies began to view nature as there for humans to use as they pleased. Such a view had a profound impact on the way humans began to deal with the environment. Should one sector of nature fail, humans could always discard it and move on and exploit other vast unlimited virgin regions and resources to provide for the demands of the burgeoning human settlements.

Fourthly, since humans thought of themselves as placed above nature, archaic humans felt that they were divinely directed to intervene actively and manipulate the

forces of nature for their advantage. In the words of Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry:

> The basic discovery in this new situation was that the reproductive power of plants could be enhanced by human care, that the seeds of the more useful plants be placed in nourishing soils, be tended, and that the harvest be divided between what was used for food and what was needed for sowing at the proper season in the following year. To carry out this program required an understanding of the orderly sequence of nature through its seasonal cycles. Although this sense of rhythmic order in the seasonal sequence was as ancient as the human itself, its precise calculation was never so necessary as when horticulture came into being. The more effectively humans entered into the natural sequence through horticulture, the greater their need for understanding its functioning. The calendar eventually became one of the main instruments of the civilizational process.[56]

During primal times, people instinctively participated in and entered into the vast cosmic drama interacting with all spirit forces and multi-various expressions of the abiding presence of the Great Mother in nature. The human engagement with nature was to a large extent magical and it was to affirm and celebrate the bounty and fecundity of the Great Mother. But that changed with the spread of the neolithic revolution. Now humans were expected not only to take what nature had to offer, but also to enter into its productive processes by aiding the fertility of favorable species of plants and animals while constricting and eliminating unfavorable ones. These archaic human-world motifs seeped into many ancient creation myths. Whether these myths reflected the variations of the ancient environmental dispositions – dispositions such as cooperation, stewardship and domination – the ideas for intervening in nature to enhance its fertility and its usefulness to human beings were advanced during archaic agrarian and pastoral times.

The fifth fact was that the ideology of fertility introduced sharp distinctions between

the sexes. The ideology under-girded the emerging new occupations -- agriculture and herding. Increasing the plant and animal yields was the primary objective of these two occupations. Both these occupations also engendered and sustained the ideology, but in distinct ways. To a large extent the division of labor between the sexes during archaic times followed the habits of hunting and gathering societies. As we have shown in the previous chapter, foraging was carried out largely by women, while hunting was undertaken by men. Thus horticulture followed by agriculture came to be associated with women, while herding was associated with men. When horticulture and agriculture were adopted in archaic times, they developed around the immediate vicinity of human settlements and villages. Because it was close to home, more women than men were involved in it. Herding evolved as an occupation of males, as it tended to expand continuously into new frontiers as men wandered farther away from their homes and settlements herding the flocks and cattle. Such polarities of human occupations brought about a sharp division not only within human society and within social relations, but also in how humans would come to view the world. The polarity between the sexes came to affect the archaic agrarian rituals and cults. The whole universe was perceived in sexual terms. The indivisible, many-sided cosmos of the primal people held together by Magna Mater -- the Great Mother -- was slowly polarized and began to be viewed as masculine and feminine spheres. Thus the sky and the heavenly bodies were represented in male images and the earth and the vegetation in feminine images. The whole cosmos was viewed as imbued with the power of fertility. Humans come to view themselves as called

to engage in the task of bringing the male and female poles of nature together to encourage fertility.

Archaic peoples' interaction with nature and their religion centered on the encouragement of fertility. Such intentional and purposeful engagement with nature had mechanical overtones. The wilderness was humanized and claimed as the land divinely sanctioned for human habitation and use. Humans began to see themselves as masters and distinct from nature. Therefore humans could use the land and all that lay therein as they pleased and as their own. The ultimate goal was to enhance the fruits of the land and increase the numbers of the flock. Women were seen more as baby machines and males as those endowed with the seed of fertilization. Women, whose occupations were limited to agriculture and child rearing, were viewed as being one with the soil of the land. The Great Mother -- Magna Mater of the primal times -- was slowly reduced to Mother Earth, the virgin always in heat, ready to receive the fertilizing dews from the celestial male deities. Male animals were elevated to the status of deserving worship. Archaic societies came to revere animals and plants essential to their survival. Animal idolatry became widespread. Totemism identifies the band with an animal, but idolatry elevates animals to objects of worship. Available evidence shows that all kinds of animals and plants were revered. Bulls and he-goats were especially worshiped in ancient Mesopotamia and the Eastern Mediterranean. Available evidence at Indus Valley excavation sites confirms that bulls may have occupied a place of veneration in these regions. These cattle-gods were also consumed as food. Archeological evidence found at the large agricultural village of

Çatal Hüyük in Turkish Anatolia shows that animal idolatry was widely practiced in these regions. One out of every three rooms of the houses was used for ritual purposes. Painted skulls of bulls mounted on the walls were used for cultic ceremonies.[57] A number of smaller female-shaped figurines with their exaggerated layers of fat and reproductive characteristics are found at the site. This confirms that a female Earth Mother image played a prominent role in the fertility cults in these areas. Both in Mesopotamia and in the Indus valley the bull cult seems to have been associated with female deities. Images of other animals like sheep, pigs, wild leopards and vultures are also found in these sites. Some of these animal images symbolize life, while others symbolize death.[58] Much of the animal idolatry and extolling of the Earth Mother were in continuity with the primal consciousness, but they had been modified to suit the archaic agrarian and pastoral ethos. Marija Gimbutas maintains that,

> not only are Neolithic goddesses composites of agricultural and pre-agricultural images, but so, too, the water bird, deer, bear, fish, snake, toad, turtle, and the notion of hybridization of animal and man, were inherited from the Paleolithic era and continued to serve as avatars of goddesses and gods. There was no such thing as a religion of mythical imagery newly created by agriculturists at the beginning of the food-producing period.[59]

It is interesting to note that the archaic cults were limited primarily to revering female images along with male animal images as true representations of the players in the cosmic drama. Male animals like bulls and he-goats and female figurines were worshiped and venerated extensively and they were yet to be replaced by any masculine human images. Nature as feminine was still the order of the day. Matriliny and matrilocality were widely

practiced in many ancient agrarian societies.[60] The Great Mother remained the only and the most embracing of all archetypes that could truly represent archaic existence. Women still played the dominant role in the economy of the community. Their social status was comparatively favorable. In primal societies, women were the primary providers of sustenance. This continued into the adoption of agriculture, and women continued to enjoy special status in the community, but there are no indications that women subjugated or oppressed men. Riane Eisler writes,

> [W]hile the feminine principle as the primary symbol of the miracle of life permeated Neolithic art and ideology, the male principle also played an important role. . . . It is interesting in this connection that there is Neolithic imagery indicating an understanding of the joint roles of women and men in procreation.[61]

We do not in archaic times come across any deity directly represented in male images. Images of the divine warrior-king representing male prowess could only evolve when organized wars become widespread in the ancient world, and this had to await the emergence of ancient urban civilizations. Clearly, the inclusion of both feminine and masculine images in the archaic pantheon reflects the egalitarian democracy of the agrarian community. Although there was a clear distinction between the sexes and matriarchy was the order of the day, there was no domination by one sex over the other. Rather, both women and men were seen essential partners for procreation, and it was an exercise of "power with" rather than "power over" the other sex.[62] Such egalitarian relations between sexes could occur only when there was some measure of peace and harmony in society and a feeling of overall wellbeing between humans and nature.

"The Fall"

Going by this observation, we ought to conclude that the earlier stages of the archaic agrarian societies to some extent enjoyed peace, prosperity, and tranquility. The ecological crisis wrought by the agrarian revolution had yet to impact the society. The Bible speaks of the Garden of Eden near the sources of the twin rivers, Euphrates and Tigris. Eden is a garden-like state of existence, which combines the motifs of both the hunting-gathering stages and the early archaic agrarian epochs. Early humans were a vital part of this Eden-like existence. *Eden* translated means "paradise" or "hunting ground." The imagery evokes the pristine human-world existence, which the temperate savanna bioregions offered. The early stages of the neolithic witnessed both hunting and agriculture. Early societies did enjoy the best of both worlds. On the other hand, gardens are designed and maintained essentially by human efforts and tastes exclusively for human enjoyment. Neolithic societies of later times came to nurture the notion that humans were divinely mandated to take care of the garden and enjoy its fruits. And in this respect, the idea of garden gradually began to exude anthropocentric motifs.

The human advance from hunting and gathering to agricultural and pastoral ways of life is generally hailed as a smart move of human ingenuity and cultural evolution. Initially the adoption of agriculture was a blessing and an impetus to cultural advance. People could live with ease and advance in every sphere. Population increased. New settlements spread. Surplus food was produced. The cattle and flocks multiplied.

Human culture advanced and new crafts and technologies were developed. People's consciousness was awakened.

Although the adoption of farming and herding may be considered an advance of human civilization, its overall impact on the immediate environment was very negative. Herbert Schneidau states that the transition from a hunting-foraging way of life to settled agricultural or nomadic pastoral societies should be considered as a fall and not an advance.[63] John Cobb maintains that it is a "fall upward" and says, "it identifies the occurrence of a new level of order and freedom bought at the price of suffering."[64] Indeed great gains were made by adopting agriculture during archaic times -- surplus food, increase in population, new crafts and technology, new myths and the over-all cultural advance. But the loss and suffering to which human society was subjected were equally great -- the widespread ecological crisis, diminishing returns from farming, human vulnerability to diseases. Dean Freudenburger supports this by saying,

> Agriculture, closely related to global deforestation by making room for expanding cropping systems, is the most environmentally abusive activity perpetuated by the human species.[65]

The expulsion of the first parents -- Adam and Eve -- from the Garden of Eden points to a traumatic historical ordeal that developed during later stages of agrarian revolution. Christian theology refers to it as "the fall." The "fall" has meant different things to different people. Students of green history learn to read ancient writings in their eco-historical contexts. Thus for these green historians, the "fall" of human beings from divine grace as rendered in the Genesis account is an index to the eco-social crises that

engulfed the ancient world following the widespread adoption of agriculture. "The fall" strikes the scene like a thunderbolt. The paradigm changes overnight. Although the effects of ecological decay were not felt at the early stages of the adoption of agriculture, the domestication of animals and plants caused deep and far-reaching changes in the human relationship to nature and came with alarming ecological and social costs. The widespread adoption of agriculture in exchange for the millennia of hunting and gathering ways of life as well as changes in climate led to devastation on all fronts, especially in the regions of ancient Mesopotamia and the Eastern Mediterranean. The full effect of the ecological crisis was realized only after three to four millennia. Nonetheless, some adverse effects like diseases and starvation were readily observed at the three core areas -- Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley and China. These effects were more or less common to other areas visited by the archaic agricultural revolution such as Central and South America. Besides, agrarian revolution also caused the depravity of human nature and accentuated evil in the society. Human greed and violence against fellow human beings eventually led to the widespread use of organized warfare as a means of subsistence during the ancient urban civilization and later during imperial times. Why did warfare and other ignominious social institutions develop in archaic times and became firmly established during ancient urban epoch is something that will demand our consideration in the ensuing chapters.

Notes

Chapter 5

Archaic Agrarian and Herding Societies and Their Impact on the Environment

you need to correct the alignment of these numbers.

1 See Shepard, Tender Carnivore and the Sacred Game.

2 See Sahlins, Stone Age Economics.

3 Mannion, Global Environmental Change, 83-89; See also Simmons J. M. Davis, The Archaeology of Animals (London: B.T. Batsford, 1987).

4 Ibid., Mannion, 73.

5 Paul Shepard, "The Eclectic Primitive", (unpublished) based on a paper, "A Post-Historic Primitivism," written for "The Wilderness Condition": *Realia* Conference on "Environment and Civilization," Estes Park, Colorado, August 17-23, 1989., 21.

6 Ehrlich and Ehrlich, Population, Resources, Environment, 9-12.

7 Ibid., Mannion, 84-85.

8 Cohen, The Food Crisis in Prehistory, 21-22.

9 Ibid, [illegible].

10 Cohen, Health and the Rise of Civilization, 154-55.

11 Cohen, The Food Crisis in Prehistory, 21-22.

12 Mannion, 84.

13 Davis, The Archeology of Animals.

14 Ponting, A Green History of the World, 40.

15 Mannion, 82.

16 Miller, Jr., Living in the Environment, 26.

17 Magaritz and Goodfriend, 173.

18 Goldberg and Bar-Yosef, "Environmental and archaeological evidence for climatic changes in the Southern Levant," 399-414.

19 Mannion, 84-85.

20 Ponting, 45.

21 Ibid., 45.

22 See Jamez S. Mellaart, Çatal-Hüyük: A Neolithic Town in Anatolia (New York: McGraw-Hill,1967); and Ian A. Todd, Çatal-Hüyük in Perspective (Menlo Park, Calif. Cummings Publishing, 1976).

23 Hughes, Ecology in Ancient Civilizations, 25.

24 Mannion, Global Environmental Change, 85.

25 Max Oelschlaeger, The Idea of Wilderness from Prehistory to the Age of Ecology (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 34.

26 Mannion, Global Environmental Change, 84-85.

27 Shepard, "The Eclectic Primitive," 28-29.

28 Oelschlaeger, 26.

29 Mannion, 85.

30 Shepard, "The Eclectic Primitive," 28-29.

31 Oelschlaeger, 29.

32 Ponting, 91.

33 Cohen, Health and The Rise of Civilization, 91f.

34 Ibid., 24.

35 Ibid.,24.

36 Mannion, 92.

37 Ibid., 69.

38 Ibid., 69.

39 Mumford, The Transformations of Man, 31-35.

40 Ponting, 53-54.

41 Ibid., Cohen, Health and The Rise of Civilization, 41.

42 Ibid., 45.

43 Ibid., 91f.

44 Ferrill, The Origins of War, 18-19.

45 Ibid., 21-23.

46 Magaritz and Goodfriend, 173.

47 Dalfes, Kukla and Weiss, Third Millennium BC Climate Change and Old World Collapse, 4; Mordeckai and Goodfriend, 177.

48 Ferrill, 18-22.

49 Ibid., 27f.

50 Ibid., 26-31.

51 Thorkild Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamia (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 77.

52 Oelschlaeger, 29.

53 Shepard, "The Eclectic Primitive," 27-28.

54 Alfred North Whitehead, Science and the Modern World (New York: Free Press, 1925), 4.

55 Oelschlaeger, 28.

56 Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, The Universe Story (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 67.

57 Hughes, 26.

58 Ibid., 26-27.

59 Marija Gimbutas, Gods and Goddesses, 237, quoted in Oelschlaeger, 35-36.

60 Eisler, The Chalice and the Blade, 24-28; Gerda Lerner, The Creation of Patriarchy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 29-35.

61 Eisler, 26.

62 Ibid., 24-28.

63 Schneidau, Sacred Discontent (Los Angeles: University of California, 1976), 43ff.

64 Charles Birch and John B. Cobb, Jr., The Liberation of Life: From Cell to the Community (Denton, Texas: Environmental Ethics Books, 1990), 118-21.

65 C. Dean Freudenberger, "Agriculture in a Postmodern World," in Spirituality and Society: Postmodern Visions, ed. David Ray Griffin (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 124.

previous page was also numbered 199.

CHAPTER 6

The Rise and Fall of Ancient Civilizations

The first major revolution to effect a profound transformation of the human-world existence was the agricultural revolution. The transition to agrarian-pastoral existence had enormous consequences, not only for the changes it brought in the modes of human-world relations, but also for the environment. The regions where agricultural and herding occupations had first spread around 9000 B.C.E. were already beginning to show signs of strain by the sixth millennium B.C.E. As we showed in Chapter 3, the changes in the orbit of the planet brought about drastic changes in the weather patters. During the mid-Holocene epoch from about 6000 B.C.E. the amplitude of the temperature range shrank, causing decreased precipitation that resulted in the advance of deserts, desiccation and aridity all across the core regions. Archaic societies had to give up wadi agriculture and move to the river basins. Hydraulic agriculture gradually replaced rain-fed agriculture in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Indus valley. These societies were forced to seek new modes of living and cross over to another important threshold -- urbanization.

Like the first one, the urban revolution also had ominous consequences for the environment and for human-world relations. The rise of ancient urban societies was precipitated by the shift from rain-fed to hydraulic agriculture in the riverine-desert regions. The initial success on this front encouraged further increases of population, which in turn pushed these societies toward urban ways of life. The first cities to emerge depended solely on the agrarian economies of the surrounding rural settlements. However, the burgeoning urban centers brought increasing pressure on the agrarian

economies, making both the cities and the rural settlements vulnerable to the vagaries of the environment.

On the social front, there were ominous developments. For the first time in human history, access to land, goods and services was curtailed for the vast majority of the common people. Urban development fomented human disdain and negativity toward nature and oppression of human groups who were close to nature. While the urban revolution ushered in advances in human culture and knowledge, it also had many pernicious effects on human society and the environment. We see this happen increasingly at Sumer in southern Mesopotamia.

Green history concludes that Sumer and the ancient urban societies of India and China suffered similar fates due to their failure to understand and respond to their environments in a sensible way. For us, who observe the rise and fall of ancient cities with the aid of green history, Sumer, Harappa and China are lessons in Human Ecology. A study of Human Ecology applied to the ancient cities offers a lesson with a beginning, an ending and a moral. Human ecology takes into account the organisms, populations and communities of both humans and nonhuman species and their ecosystems. The study also takes into account the important variables in the socio-cultural impacts of the human population on the ecosystem.[1] Ecosystems are "inconstant in the face of changing modes of human use, management, habitation and neglect."[2] The science of Human Ecology aids us in understanding the process of environmental changes caused by human presence and actions. Nevertheless, the full effects of human cultural advances on the environment are difficult to predict and assess. All that we can assert is that unrestrained abuse of the environment will ultimately destroy both the environment and the societies.

Furthermore, the abuse of nature goes hand in hand with the exploitation of humans by humans -- the male nobility oppressing the peasants, artisans, women, children and slaves.

What is of primary interest to us here is not what the archaic cities achieved, but why they failed and vanished from the face of the earth. The failure had many dimensions -- environmental, social, religious and historical. Formulated briefly, the story may be read as follows.

1. The growth and development of the ancient urban centers were based on the initial prosperity of the agrarian and herding economies in the riverine-desert environments. But the river-fed desert environments are fragile.

2. When the agrarian economies foundered, urban societies began to disintegrate.

3. The growing frustration with the diminishing returns from the agrarian enterprise and the hard labor required to keep the farms productive made the urban elite disdain nature and all the menial tasks associated with farming. Thus the urban gentry were esteemed over the agrarians, artisans, herdsmen, women, rural folk and slaves.

4. The essential tenets of the urban ideology are (a) that the presence of human beings in the world is the pivotal event of cosmic history, (b) that humans are the most important species in the world, (c) that nature is wild and chaotic, and (d) that therefore humans should subdue and harness the environment by acquiring and dealing with it as material property.

5. In eco-social terms, the urban ideology means (a) that urban societies are the most cultured human group, (b) that the urban erudite and the ruling elite, by virtue of their class, caste and remoteness from nature, hold the right to dominate human communities

that are close to the soil, (c) that the urban elite is called to dominate, control and establish order in the uncivil society and in the chaotic nature, and (d) that property rights are absolute, sacred and generally available only for the urban gentry.

The lost civilization of Sumer testifies to the above. While the data on the misfortunes that befell Sumerian society are substantial, the information on the civilizations of India and China is very incomplete. Nevertheless, we may conclude that these ancient civilizations also suffered ecological and social catastrophes similar to those that befell Sumer. Although each of them was unique and developed and waned according to its own pace and tenor, similar afflictions assailed them all. One reason for the uniformity in their sagas was the similarity of their ecological niches. The centers of ancient civilization in the Fertile Crescent and Egypt existed in the fertile regions of the perennial rivers flowing through the parched deserts. Their economies were totally dependent on the agrarian economies of the surrounding rural settlements, which profited from the fertile soil of the desert plains. But the river plains of the desert lands are fragile and, unlike other ecosystems, easily disintegrate and succumb to human impingement and intrusion. Unfortunately, the societies of the lost civilizations did not understand the environmental and social dynamics that brought down their cities.

This persuades us to inquire as to why the phenomenon as such was widespread, stretching from the Mesopotamia to China and Mesoamerica. What was unique about the environment and the people living within it at that time? These centers of civilization were all ensconced within certain topographical, latitudinal and climatic boundaries. The ancient civilizations of Egypt, Sumer, Assyria, Greece, Palestine, Harappa and China,

although far apart, were remarkably similar in some respects. Confirming this, Paul Shepard writes,

> Although it seems inimical to human life, the desert -- the great dry belts that straddle the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn -- is the home of the world's civilizations. At the water holes and along the rivers of the arid subtropics of Asia, Africa, and Europe where the three continents join, history began -- not in the sandy desert proper, but at its edges. These margins are not desert habitats proper, but ecological *ecotones.* They include the spare shrub communities at the fringe of sandy plains or stony plateaus; the patches of grassland on slightly moister slopes; traces of savanna; the evergreen dry forest of the mountain islands; the verdant park and wetlands of the oases and river margins proper; and the derelict phases of all such vegetative communities degenerating toward barren rock as a result of climatic change and human abuse [original emphasis].[3]

The pre-axial civilizations came into existence, survived and many of them vanished in the arid regions, on the banks of perennial rivers: the Nile, the Sindhu, the Euphrates and the Tigris. The case of China was slightly different. River Yangtse flows through semi-arid loess plains of the north of the country. Although the area is semi-arid, most of the rain falls in the summer, making crop cultivation possible. Urban civilization developed in China much later, around 1750 B.C.E. The banks, the basins and the backyards of the perennial rivers flowing through arid and semi-arid regions abetted the rise and fall of ancient civilizations. These regions are strewn with the ruins of ancient citadels, city squares and market places. These terrains facilitated the human transition from hunting-foraging to agrarian-pastoral life and on to urban civilization.

What we demarcate as ancient civilization is somewhat arbitrary and depends on what we mean by the term urban. What distinguishes an urban center from a rural town has been a problem for anthropologists and archeologists alike. Attempts have been made to define and understand the urban phenomenon, especially the ancient civilizations. The problem is exacerbated by the inconsistent use of the terms "city," "state" and

"civilization" not only in popular literature, but also in scholarly literature. Australian-born V. Gordon Childe addressed this issue by selecting a series of characteristics that defined a truly urban society. Gordon R. Willey, Charles Redman and others, summarizing Childe's criteria for urban societies, include a large and dense population, specialization of labor and craft, class structure, a system of taxation, a central bureaucracy of government and military apparatus, defined political and territorial boundaries, monumental public-works (temples, palaces, storehouses, and irrigation systems), long-distance trade, use of writing, scientific knowledge and development of technology.[4]

What is readily apparent in this urban profile is that artifacts that typify social domination and control have guided the archeologists. Opulent palaces and villas, monumental structures, weapons of war, city walls, watch towers, idols of male deities and pointers to patriarchy, slavery, taxation and hierarchy were the marks that for these archeologists and historians, displayed the essential bearings of the golden age of ancient civilizations. Societies that were devoid of the icons of human domination and control were written off as retrogressive and primitive. Early archeologists and historians were mostly males, and the articles of faith to which they subscribed pushed them to look for cultural advances in male domination, aggression and conquest. The practice of archeology before World War II was concerned more with acquiring antiques for museums in the West than with knowing the actual facts and realities of the past.[5]

Pointers to alternate societies exemplifying egalitarianism, democratic means to gain a social consensus, peaceful ways of living and settling conflicts without wars, matrilocal and matrilineal family groups and the prominence of the feminine deities, priestesses and

the queendoms were overlooked. These did not fit the expected patterns and trajectory of human cultural progress. In confirming this bias of the early archeologists, James Mellaart writes, "Although archaeological research has made great progress in the last quarter of a century, interpretation has not kept up with discoveries and much of the theory of cultural development seems sadly out of date."[6]

Secondly, Childe and his fellow archeologists did not venture beyond defining human society through a dominator model. They failed to note that the dynamics of domination and control were not directed only to members of human societies. Ancient urban societies subsisted and prospered not only by dominating the peasantry but also by exploiting the surrounding marsh and woodlands. The profile on cities that Childe and his team offered is incomplete without the recognition of the human domination of nature.[7] Of course, when Childe and his peers determined the criteria for a truly urban society, the age of ecology had not yet dawned and Green History as an academic discipline had yet to make its mark. Early archeologists who excavated the sites at the ancient urban centers did not focus on the ecological dynamics of the lost civilizations.

Nevertheless, there were archaic urban societies that did not fit the dominator model of societies. This suggests that there may well be strategies for urban societies today that do not resort to ecological and social domination. Urbanism need not endanger the environment, or the people who inhabit the cities. Paolo Soleri, a visionary, has proposed what he calls "arcologies"-- cities built as compact units eliminating the need to use resources in ways that degrade the environment and the life in the cities.[8] Arcology envisages enhancing the health of both humans and the environment. Our study of

ancient cities shows that the earliest phases of some urban societies were free from the domination and control that were so noticeable in the later stages of urban development.

Space does not permit us to evaluate individually every ancient civilization. Our focus here is on the background of Judeo-Christian tradition and its ambiguous stand on nature. Our attention is drawn therefore to the regions of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Levant. Readers may wonder why we discuss Egypt when it is not a site of axial revolution. It is intriguing to see that while the saga of Mesopotamia substantiates our thesis in a straightforward manner, the case of Egypt escapes such generalizations. For one thing, ancient Egypt, although it achieved heights of cultural glory during the Pharaohs' dynasties and then declined, did not vanish like the other ancient urban centers. Neither did it give birth to axial movements. Why is this? We need to weigh the case of ancient Egypt along with other ancient urban civilizations in the region, because in a negative way Egypt also advances our thesis.

First Phase of Urbanism: Temple Towns and Un-walled Cities

Sumer was perhaps the first region in the ancient world to see the rise of cities. Archeologists have excavated sixteen cities buried for over three millennia beneath the desert sands in southern Iraq.[9] Nowhere else do we witness so clearly the amazing feats of human cultural advance -- the proliferation of writing, science, technology, arts, schools, mathematics, astronomy, and legal codes -- as well as the pervasive social and environmental problems. In Samuel Noah Kramer's History Begins at Sumer: Thirty-nine Firsts in Man's Recorded History,[10] he lists many important contributions Sumer made to the advancement of human culture and civilization as well as many things that

were wrong in the society. In spite of the phenomenal gains in knowledge and expertise, the society disintegrated. A variety of causes led to its downfall. Prominent among them, according to the green historians, was that the Sumerians failed to see the nexus between the demands of human cultural advances and the capacity of the environment to sustain them. They did not understand the growing ecological crisis that was bringing both their society and the peasant economy down. Sumerians did attempt some shade-tree gardening.[11] But gardening did little to avert a growing environmental crisis – advancing deserts and desiccation.

Mesopotamia, the "cradle of civilization" in southwest Asia, probably contributed more to the advancement of civilization than any other region before the advent of the axial age.[12] Egypt developed into an urban society only a little later. These ancient urban civilizations span over four millennia, beginning with the emergence of the pre-dynastic cities of southern Mesopotamia around the late Neolithic, from 4500 B.C.E. to the conquest of Persia by Alexander the Great in 331 B.C.E. These dates to some extent correlate to cities that were considered to be 'truly urban' as defined by Gordon Childe, although, as we have already pointed out, the early stage of urban development does not quite fit Childe's profile of urbanism.

Ancient civilization had a distinct beginning, middle and ending. Unfortunately our history textbooks and the archeological records narrate the middle story and leave out the beginning and the ending. For us whose interests lie primarily in human-world realities, the beginning and the ending are just as important. First, is the early-urban phase – the pre-patriarchal temple-towns; second, the growth of city-states; and third, the decline of city-states and the rise of empires.[13] The third phase occurred in the two millennia B.C.E.

– from the fall of ancient urban centers to the fall of the Persian Empire. This segment -- the rise and fall of ancient empires -- although in continuity with the ancient urban civilizations, actually provided the context for the emergence of axial figures.

The First Phase of the urban revolution begins at Sumer, the "cradle of civilization," in the south Mesopotamian regions of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers around 4500 B.C.E. The twin rivers originate in the snow-covered Armenian Mountains in eastern Turkey and flow through Syria and northern Iraq into the desert flood plains of southern Iraq. For millennia, the twin rivers had brought down heavy loads of silt from the headwater regions and had made the desert plains of Mesopotamia fertile. Much of the silt had flowed down long before Sumerians came on the scene. Silt may also have been washed down stream due to soil erosion caused by agrarian and pastoral occupations in the headwater regions from about 9000 B.C.E. The result was that over the millennia, the rivers had built up their banks and beds well above the surrounding plains.[14] Thus, the regions of the Fertile Crescent offered a favorable setting for the first farmers and the city dwellers. Nevertheless, the high levels of the river flow above the surrounding plains made the region prone to frequent floods and other environmental disasters.

By 5300 B.C.E., the hill tribes of Hassunans, Samarrans and Halafians expanded into the southern Mesopotamian plain. The Samarran tribes pushed into southern Mesopotamia and began crop cultivation by irrigation. During the mid-Holocene period, from about 6000 B.C.E., Mesopotamia became a dry region with an annual rainfall of six to eight inches, with summer temperatures reaching well above 125 degrees. The scanty rainfall over the fertile deserts lands prompted these early Mesopotamian societies to harness the waters of the twin rivers for farming by digging irrigation canals to take the

waters to distant fields in the desert land. Ancient Mesopotamians were the first to invent and refine the use of the plow. Plowing and irrigation made it possible to extend the arable lands. By 5000 B.C.E. small-scale irrigation-based agriculture spread along the plains of the Euphrates and Tigris in southern Mesopotamia. The water and silt brought down by the twin rivers made it possible to produce many crops and surplus food. It precipitated an increase in population and the increase in population necessitated bringing more lands under irrigation. As the population grew and spread so did the complexity of the irrigation canals, channeling river waters to remote areas to claim large tracts of desert land for agriculture. The increased productivity of the land enabled farmers to grow a large surplus of food. This freed many people from farming to engage in industry and trade and to pursue civil professions. Out of this agrarian economy rose an urban civilization that gave rise to many city-states in the arid desert lands of Southern Mesopotamia.

Archaeologist Charles Redman developed what he termed the "system-ecological" model to explain the rise of civilization in Mesopotamia.[15] This model incorporates many of the causal ecological and sociological factors we have advanced here. Redman considers factors like pristine ecological niches, colonizing, irrigation techniques, population pressure, intensification of agriculture, surplus foodstuff and products, increase in settlement size, craft specialization, trade, concentration of wealth, class society, internal conflicts and warfare. Redman arranges these facts in a non-linear, multi-factorial system framework, and describes the rise of ancient cities in Mesopotamia as the outcome of a series of incremental processes that were triggered by favorable ecological and cultural conditions through mutually reinforcing interactions.

Redman did not consider the changes in climate since the mid-Holocene epoch described in chapter 3. With these in view, we can offer a more comprehensive scenario of the Holocene epoch changes in climate that induced drastic changes in the environment of Mesopotamia. Retreat of savannas, loss of hunting grounds, and advance of deserts forced human communities to quit their habitats, seek out virgin fields near deltas and banks of perennial rivers and build towns and cities. Human societies living by wadi occupations and rain-fed horticulture at the upper reaches of Mesopotamia and the Arabian peninsula immigrated into the delta regions to pursue agricultural and pastoral occupations. Towns and cities that grew out of this migration and concentration of population came to reflect the ethos of archaic agrarian culture and society. Much the same scenario brought people from the Eastern Sahara to the Nile flood plains and delta.

An important variable in the development of ancient cities was religion. Religion provided the glue necessary to hold the society and its institutions together. In fact, the birth of ancient towns and cities can be traced to the cultic sites and tribal shrines. The religious acumen of the agrarian mentality called for erection of shrines and temples. Archeological findings confirm that village settlements and towns grew around ceremonial sites -- sites which were centers of totems, animal sacrifice and idolatry -- and these settlements eventually became towns and cities.[16] Most communal and ceremonial galas were held at the shrines. Shrines and temples at the center of villages and towns or the sacred groves and rock gardens adjacent to the settlements served as the places where community councils, courts, and festivals were held. As shrines and temples became permanent and grew in importance, extensive architectural structures were built, making them the most imposing edifices of the settlement.[17] Temples were the centers of power,

and priest-craft prevailed as the dominant social profession in ancient towns and cities. For millennia they functioned as the organizing centers of the whole tribe and united the far-flung agrarian settlements. Thus we may safely conclude that religion engendered the advent of urban development. From the perspectives of Green History, the First Phase of the development of ancient cities was perhaps the best period of the urban revolution.

As temples and shrines became important, they acquired social power and prestige. In fact, temples and shrines were the largest public undertaking and the most commodious structures. Gradually, the temples began to acquire farmlands and undertake storage and distribution of grain stock. The temple employed a large labor force. Clive Ponting, writing about the cities of Sumer, says,

> Archaeological investigation of the very earliest towns has revealed a considerable degree of internal social organization from the beginning of settlement in the area. Nearly all had large temples as the focus of urban life and they played a fundamental part in the redistribution of resources among farmers, the religious elite and specialist craftsmen, by controlling food production and distributing rations to all members of the community . . . . At Uruk huge temples were constructed (including one 225 feet long, 200 feet wide and 40 feet high) and they were regularly rebuilt. This would have required the organization of large amounts of labor and illustrates the degree of control already exercised by the main religious organizations. By 3500 BC Uruk was already a substantial ceremonial center with only small settlements in the surrounding region.[18]

The temple cults in the early phase of the cities were closely associated with the agrarian economy. Agrarian cults and deities were easily absorbed into the city cults. Any bounty in the agrarian sector must have been seen as resulting from the approbation of the agrarian deities worshipped in these temples. Surplus food above the requirements of the individual cultivator needed to be transported, stored and distributed. This called for a centralized bureaucracy and a marketplace, which could handle the process. And temples, having the dominant social power and commodious structures, took on the task

of storing and distributing surplus food. In such a milieu, the temples and its priests and priestesses acquired significant social power and prestige.

In the earliest cities in Mesopotamia, the temple seems to have owned all the land and its priests and administrators were responsible for collecting food, storing it and then distributing it, often in uniform rations. Other agricultural resources were also held centrally -- at Shuruppak the temple owned and accounted for 9,660 donkeys -- and ploughing was organized through labor gangs.[19] Many of the early cities and towns had their own patron deities that were invariably female. The collective power of the cities was concentrated in the council of priests and priestesses who administered the day-to-day running of the temple as well as the affairs of the cities. The temples also seemed to have had administrative control over the surrounding countryside. This early stage of the cities has been termed variously the "pre-dynastic," "pre-walled" and "pre-palace" stage.[20]

What these terms mean is that the cities and towns of the earlier period were largely free from the dominance of the secular-war-lords. There was no standing army to guard the city. Cities were not walled. Agrarian cults continued to be the organizing force of the cities. There was a primitive form of theocracy -- the union of the Church and the State, with priests and priestesses serving as elders and judges of the city councils and managing the daily affairs of the cities and their economies. The temple officials ensured the just distribution of the surplus food among all its citizens. The fact that the temples and their priests and priestesses controlled the social affairs of the cities meant that some degree of moral and spiritual responsibility was exercised in guiding the affairs of these ancient cities. Merlin Stone, the author of When God was a Woman, suggests that the

earlier societies of Sumer were less hierarchical and more communally oriented.[21] We learn from an ancient Sumerian tablet that the presiding deity of the city of Nanshe was Goddess Nanshe. She was known for her generosity and compassion and she was worshiped as one who cared for the orphans and the widows. Goddess Nanshe also sought justice for the poor and shelter for the weak.[22] Ancient cities run by temples were concerned with social justice -- the just distribution of wealth and services. Riane Eisler maintains that the temple cities of the earlier stages of urban revolution practiced more humane customs, having laws that sought to serve the poor and needy in the community. Although references to these are first found in the documents of the Urukagina reforms of the later period, Eisler holds that these laws and regulations actually date back to the earlier era, and in that respect "were simply reasserting the moral and ethical precepts of that earlier time."[23]

Secondly, from all accounts, it is clear that women in the earlier society had a lot to do with the overall wellbeing of the society. The presiding deities of the temples were goddesses and the existence of a large band of priestesses shows the power of women in the earlier societies. Women seem to have held a place of honor and leadership in public life.

In the tablets recovered from Erech, a city in Sumer, we read that the presiding deity of the city was Goddess Nidaba. Nidaba was known as the lawgiver, "The Learned of the Holy Chambers, She who teaches the Decrees."[24] Eisler says,

> Such ancient names of the Goddess as the Giver of Law, of Justice, and of Mercy, and the first Judge would also seem to indicate the existence of some earlier codification of laws, and possibly even a judicial system of some complexity, in which the Sumerian priestess who served the Goddess perhaps adjudicated disputes and administered justice.[25]

In many Mesopotamian legends and inscriptions we find recurring references to the goddess, "Queen of Heaven." A Sumerian prayer exalts the glorious Queen Nana, the goddess, as "the Mighty Lady, the Creatress." Another tablet refers to the Goddess Nammu as "the Mother who gave birth to heaven and earth."[26] Obviously, these religious connotations were residues of the archaic agrarian cults that reflected what Eisler calls "partnership communities" -- communities of consonance between male and female and between humans and nature -- and the implicit faith in the benevolence of Mother Earth. Eisler concludes, "It is quite obvious that this was in Mesopotamia a time before male domination, when the supremacy of fearful, armed male deities became the norm."[27]

Secondly, feminist scholars like Eisler, Nancy Tanner, Lila Leibowitz, and Linda Marie Fedigan maintain that the actual flowering of civilization occurred when women were free from male domination.[28] Available evidences seem to suggest that much of the cultural sophistication and advance in human knowledge, science and simple technologies occurred during the period when there were surplus food and prosperity all around. If this is true, we need to ask whether the creation of ancient cities is evidence of male ingenuity alone or the creative power of the female as well. If women had such an influence in the early stages of urban evolution, and if cities were the gifts of civilization, major spiritual and material inventions were actually made by women in those societies.

The ancient societies of Sumer, Harappa, Egypt and China made significant advances in arts, science, technology, politics and culture. Sumer developed and refined exquisite artwork, cuneiform writing, mathematics, engineering, the calendar, astronomy, metallurgy and a code of law. Sumerians were perhaps the first people in the world to

invent the art of writing. The earliest written records, whether in Sumer or Egypt or China (Harappan writing is yet to be disciphered), did not recount historic events or the mighty exploits of male warriors. Rather, they were used for recording business transactions and for accounting purposes. The accounting was about the storing and distribution of the grain stockpiles in the temple storehouses.[29] If the temples and their priests and priestesses advanced the growth and welfare of the urban societies, and if writing was invented for the purpose of food distribution at the temple storehouses, it would seem likely that women had a part in inventing writing as well as in contributing toward other technological inventions of early civilization.

Thirdly, one of the intriguing features of the early stages of urban development was that most cities were un-walled. This was especially true of the early phase of Sumerian society when we find that cities were not fortified for centuries. Archaeological work done at these sites shows that not until 2600 B.C.E. did fortifications become a general rule.[30] Fortifications are for security and they indicate the existence of warfare.

Ecologically and socially, this was the best period of ancient civilization. Not only was there material prosperity, but there was also social harmony, which furthered the advance of the evolution of human culture. Wars were rare. Crop yields reached their highest level and the abundance of surplus food could make the cities grow prosperous. Clive Ponting notes that "until about 2400 B.C. crop yields remained high, in some areas at least as high as in medieval Europe and possibly even higher."[31] One wishes that this first phase of the early cities could have lasted forever. But it could not. Environmental degradation and the growing social unrest worked against the continued prosperity of the early cities. Soon the story turns vile, as the second phase of the urban evolution moves

into what Eisler calls "The Dark Order out of Chaos" and "The Truncation of Civilization."[32]

Second Phase of Urbanism: City-States and Walled Cities

During the second stage of urban evolution, the cultural gains made in the first phase level off, and a significant phase of cultural regress begins. Male dominance ousts female benevolence. The feminine is subjugated by male dominance. Wars and warlords take center stage. Power moves away from the temples into the hands of the secular forces of warrior-kings and bureaucrats. Sumer moves into this phase at the onset of the Early Dynastic period, 2900 to 2400 B.C.E., while in Egypt, the second phase begins around 3050 B.C.E. when Pharaoh Narmer of Hierakonpolis unified Upper and Lower Egypt into a single state.

Initially, the political institution of cities was closely related to the temple. The centralized authority was made up of priests, bureaucrats and merchants. Skirmishes between cities for arable lands became increasingly widespread. The temple bureaucracy was unable to defend the cities. A warrior class under a strong leader had to emerge in every city. These leaders eventually gave rise to the institution of monarchy and hereditary kings. In due course, the kings built large armies, surrounded themselves with courts and great wealth, and became increasingly independent from the temple. The king and his bureaucracy organized and managed the economy and the daily life of the common people -- the craftsmen, construction workers, farmers, herdsmen, sailors and fishermen and the population of the surrounding agrarian settlements.

During this phase, Sumerian societies constructed extensive and more complex irrigation canals. In the first phase of urban society, temple administration undertook to oversee and execute simple communal projects. But as population increased and as more people migrated into the urban centers, temple administration was unable to meet the social and economic demands of the populace. Constructing complex irrigation systems and other public projects was beyond the power of benign temple-centered organizations. It required a different type of bureaucracy, a centralized coercive authority that could mobilize and direct a large labor force. Labor gangs laid vast networks of irrigation channels across the flat river plains. The waters of the Euphrates and the Tigris were controlled, and floods were routed by dams and channels away from the cities and farms. The labor gangs also built many other public projects. Many Ziggurats -- temples on platforms -- were built and became the dominant structures of the larger communities. The Ziggurats served as the seats of power of the rulers who deployed and directed the labor gangs to undertake the building of palaces, huge temples and protective walls around the city. The spread of hydraulic agriculture encouraged the growth of large settlements along the banks of the river. Similar public utility structures and massive buildings, palaces and protective walls around cities were constructed at all the core centers of civilization. The pyramids of Egypt and the public bath places of Harappa are cases in point.

The erection of walls around cities was a significant fact during this stage. How could this drastic transformation of societies come about -- peaceful cities turning into violent warmongering societies, un-walled cities becoming fortified citadels, men dominating women, temples ceding powers to the warrior-king and the bureaucrats, and urban gentry

coercing the peasants and artisans into lives of servitude? Green History shows that this change occurred just about the time that there was a significant decline in crop yields. The population had increased phenomenally during the peaceful centuries of the pre-walled city-states. In Sumer, around 3000 B.C.E. the agrarian prosperity had leveled off and from around 2500 B.C.E. crop yields began to drop significantly. The decline in crop yields touched off a food crisis, causing raiding and pillaging of agrarian townships and cities. Walls and watchtowers were quickly erected. Archaic partnership societies were turned into hierarchical and patriarchal societies. Agrarian cults of the Earth Mother, sky gods and animal idolatry were displaced by urban cults revering the divine-warrior-priest-king.

As the cities were fortified and the dynastic kingdoms emerged, agrarian cults of the fertility-mediation motifs began to give way to new cults. These cults came to recast the transcendent forces of the sky into male deities reflecting the domination and control by the warlords and their bureaucrats. These emerging new cults reflected the growing domination over the peasantry, women and nature by the urban gentry. Archaic egalitarian, democratic and cooperative ways of living were given up in exchange for urban ideologies and motifs of domination, control, order, and subjugation of the masses by the autocracy. Matrilineal and matrifocal communal-familial relationships and the lifestyles of the agrarian and pre-walled centuries were replaced by patriarchy, hierarchy, and class and caste structures.[33] The priests manipulated the religious motifs to consolidate the power in the hands of the urban elite and the king. Thus the city cults came to have a strong theocratic component and were closely allied with the political and bureaucratic organization.

During this stage of urban development male deities took preeminence over the female deities. The overarching feminine grace reflective of the archaic cultures slowly gave way to women being seen more as storehouses of fecundity. The Magna Mater -- the Great Mother -- was reduced to the Earth Mother on par with or less than the celestial male deities. Paul Shepard holds that Earth Mother ideologies oppressed women rather than elevated them.

> The identity of the woman with the land is the agricultural monument, where the environment is genderized and she becomes the means of productivity, reciprocity and access to otherness, compressed in the central symbol of the goddess. As the subsistence base erodes this morality changes. Fanaticism about virginity, women as pawns in games of power, and their control by men as the touchstone of honor and vengeance has been clearly shown to be the destiny of sub-equatorial and Mediterranean agriculture.[34]

Unlike the archaic agrarian societies in which both women and men were equal, the urban mentality brought sharp distinctions between the sexes, viewing men as superior.

This was evident in the schools in Sumer, where children were prepared and trained for responsible adult life. In the earlier stages of urban development, temples ran schools. Both boys and girls attended these schools and were taught the art of reading, writing and all manners of crafts. But in the later stages of urban evolution, when the schools of Sumer became secular institutions free from the temples, we find only male students.[35]

Why women were associated with the advance of human civilization during the earlier, but not the later stages, is something about which we can only speculate. Suffice it to say here that one of the reasons for the shift in the destiny of women in the later phases may have been the drastic change in the human-world existence brought about by the growing environmental crisis of that time. Declining food stocks hastened recurring

pillaging and wars, which encouraged the male dominance in the society. The earliest phase of urban evolution was free from these cataclysms. From all accounts it appears that this was one of the best epochs in human history. It brought out the best in the evolution of civilized societies and it was largely made possible by the active participation and contributions of women in those ancient societies.[36]

All these changed during the second and the third phase of the urban civilization. During the final phase, the cities of Sumer encountered serious environmental and social catastrophes. Third millennium B.C.E. witnessed some of the worst sandstorms and aridity that visited Sumer and its adjourning regions. It disrupted the society and caused conflicts. Cities of Sumer could never be united by themselves. Long running feuds and frequent skirmishes between these cities kept them divided and at war with each other. Proliferation of weapons and wars escalated with a vengeance. The prominent cities of Sumer -- Kish, Uruk, Ur and Lagash -- became highly militaristic and continually competed for domination of the area.[37] In 2370 B.C.E., Sargon of Agade conquered and unified most of the Sumerian cities and established the Akkadian Empire, the first of a series of empires that tormented the Mesopotamian region. For the next two millennia, a succession of marauding hordes and armies -- Akkadians, Elamites, Amorites, Kassites, Assyrians, Babylonians, Medes and Persians -- conquered and decimated the independent minded societies of the Fertile Crescent region and established their own empires.[38] With the arrival of Alexander the Great from Macedonia in 334 B.C.E., the glory of ancient Mesopotamia faded.

Ecological and Social Impacts of Ancient Civilizations

Reading the history of the Fertile Crescent makes one wonder why these ancient civilizations and their cities succumbed so easily to internal and external aggressions against them. Leonard Woolley, one of those who excavated ancient Sumer, in his 1936 book entitled Ur of the Chaldees puzzled over the desolate, largely treeless landscape of contemporary southern Mesopotamia.[39]

> Only to those who have seen the Mesopotamian desert will the evocation of the ancient world seem well-nigh incredible, so complete is the contrast between past and present . . . . [I]t is yet more difficult to realize, that the blank waste ever blossomed, bore fruit for the sustenance of a busy world. Why, if Ur was an empire's capital, if Sumer was once a vast granary has the population dwindled to nothing, the very soil lost its virtue?[40]

From the perspective of green history, the answer seems obvious and simple. The fall of Sumer and the successive conquest of the Fertile Crescent were contemporaneous with diminishing returns on the agrarian front and declining crop yields. The political fortunes of Sumer and its city-states closely followed the steady decline of the agricultural base.[41] Throughout this period of nearly three millennia -- from the flourishing city-states of Sumer to the mighty empires of Babylon and Persia, crop yields continued to fall, making these societies susceptible to frequent famine.[42] Clive Ponting writes,

> [A]s the limit of cultivatable land was reached and salinisation took an increasing toll, the food surplus began to fall rapidly. Crop yields fell 42 per cent between 2400 and 2100 BC and by 65 per cent by 1700 BC. . . . By 1800 BC, when yields were only about a third of the level obtained during the Early Dynastic period, the agricultural base of Sumer had effectively collapsed and the focus of Mesopotamian society shifted permanently to the north, where a succession of imperial states controlled the region, and Sumer declined into insignificance as an underpopulated, impoverished backwater of empire.[43]

The fall of the ancient cities of southwest Asia was primarily due to the failure to understand and respond sensibly to the ecological dynamics and the vulnerability of the

fragile desert environment. The Sumerians had built a massive urban bureaucratic and military superstructure over a weak and declining agrarian economy. Centuries of agricultural and pastoral pursuits in the region had undermined the very foundations of their urban culture. Both at the headwaters as well as on the plains of the twin rivers, forest and grass cover had been stripped away.

The lower Mesopotamian region consists of flat plains -- the land rising at the rate of one inch per 100 feet. Flat lands prevent soil erosion and the soil remains fertile with new silt brought down by the rivers. Nevertheless, the irrigation system needed to exploit the soil caused problems. Over the years, the irrigation canals became clogged with silt and mud. Constant dredging was necessary to keep them flowing. Excavated silt and mud carried by the rivers and canals were piled up as mounds along the sides of the rivers and canals to a height of thirty to fifty feet. The Sumerians had not built any drainage conduits. Clogged canals prevented drainage. Also the river level was raised well above the surrounding plains, causing frequent floods and shifts in the course of the rivers. The constant struggle to keep the canals free from clogging and diminishing returns from the crop cultivation made the Sumerians abandon many of the irrigation canals and the surrounding farm lands. This resulted in a food crisis and vulnerability to attacks from within and without.[44]

The second major problem was the increase in the salt content of the soil. The flat lands caused severe water logging. In the summer, temperatures reached as high as 40 °C, increasing evaporation and consequently the level of salt in the soil. As the land became more waterlogged and the water table rose, more salt was brought to the surface, where the high evaporation rate produced a thick layer of salt, making the lands look

white. Contemporary records from around 2000 B.C.E. state that "the earth turned white," which is a clear reference to the excessive salinization of the lands.[45] The only solution to salinization is to leave the land fallow and un-watered for long periods. Nevertheless, the need to feed a growing population -- bureaucrats, standing armies, artisans and common people -- increased the pressure to intensify cultivation by bringing more lands under irrigation.[46] About 3500 B.C.E. both wheat and barely were grown in southern Mesopotamia. But wheat does not tolerate high salt content in the soil, whereas barely can. The increasing salinity of the soil meant Sumerians were forced to give up wheat cultivation, and instead had to cultivate only salt tolerant barley. Clive Ponting writes,

> By 2500 BC wheat had fallen to only 15 per cent of the crop; by 2100 Ur had abandoned wheat production and overall it had declined to just 2 per cent of the crops gown in the Sumerian region. By 2000 the cities of Islin and Larsa no longer grew wheat and by 1700 BC salt levels in the soil throughout the whole of southern Mesopotamia were so high that no wheat at all was grown . . . . Then, as the limit of cultivatable land was reached and salinisation took an increasing toll, the food surplus began to fall rapidly.[47]

The failure of farming brought insidious social consequences on ancient societies. The peaceful pre-walled temple towns were changed into oppressive and power mongering urban societies. Dating from 3000 B.C.E., the cities of Sumer became highly stratified. Access to and control of surplus food, resources and property created social differentiation and the first class-based societies in Sumer.[48] The slaves were at the bottom of the hierarchy. The bulk of the population -- farmers and craftsmen -- formed the second layer, above which were the administrative, religious and military elite. The aristocrats, priests and bureaucrats organized and managed the economy and the daily life

of the common people and slaves and accumulated and distributed surplus food and resources.

Maintaining the opulence and leisure of the ruling class required a large labor force. The ruling class despised manual labor. Digging irrigation canals, shoveling silt to keep the canals unclogged and other farming operations required backbreaking labor. Human muscle power together with animal power drove the agrarian economies in Sumer. The required human labor was obtained from slaves brought in as captives from the vanquished neighboring city-states. Besides, slave labor was imposed on new immigrants, especially on environmental refugees migrating from the famine stricken regions into the more prosperous city-states.[49] Rampant institutionalized slavery was a mark of ancient civilizations. Lewis Mumford writes, "Slavery, compulsory labor, social regimentation, economic exploitation and organized warfare: this is the darker side of the progress of civilization."[50] The history of the Fertile Crescent is a record of repeated brutalities perpetrated against common people and slaves so as to maintain the city gentry's opulent ways of life. Societies do not endure tyranny and oppression for long. Sabotage and revolt frequented these societies.

Sargon of Akkad was a slave and the cupbearer to the king of Kish, a city in Sumer. One night in 2340 B.C.E. Sargon, with the aid of fellow Akkadian slaves, mounted a surprise coup, assassinated the king and his guards, toppled the government of Kish and established himself as the ruler. Eventually he defeated other Sumerian city-states and established the Akkadian Empire, which was the first of a series of brutal empires that came to torment the Fertile Crescent successively for two thousand years. Coup,

treachery and debauchery among the bureaucrats and in the palace made this region vulnerable to frequent attacks by their own people and by forces from outside.[51]

As we have shown, during the first phase of the ancient civilizations, the temples played a dominant role in the organization of the cities. Dating from 3000 B.C.E., the temples of Sumer lost hold on the people and the land. These temples and their storehouses came under increasing attacks from the marauding tribes and the roving herdsmen.[52] The temple management could not ward off attacks and plundering.[53] New male centered institutions had to evolve to protect the temples and the cities' wealth. Warlords with band of warriors emerged and seized power from the temples. The civic power now shifted from the temples into the hands of bureaucrats and warlords. The chief warlord eventually came to install him as the monarch of the city. Thus, the palace, military establishments, bureaucrats and private individuals came to own the land and wield power. Walter Wink says,

> By the time of the massive city-states of Sumer and Babylon around 3000 B.C.E., autocracy was already the accepted order of things. Warfare flourished. Soldiers in standing armies fought with new bronze weapons, and sometimes from horseback. Their social system had become rigidly hierarchical, authoritarian and patriarchal. Some of these warrior peoples worshiped their weapons. Others revered divinities of war, whose will decreed the massacre of their male victims and the sexual subjugation of their female victims. Women were beginning to be deprived of the right both to speak their minds and to control their bodies.[54]

In this process, women as a whole lost their privileged place in the society and increasingly made subservient to the males. Thus, we witness the rise of oppressive social institutions and they all seem to have their roots to some extent in the environmental crisis of that day.

Samuel Noah Kramer, in his History Begins at Sumer, lists the problems Sumerian cities encountered, calling Sumerian society "The First Sick Society." The problems he lists include juvenile delinquency, poverty, violation of contracts, falsification of weights and measures, oppression of the powerless, injustice, a generation gap, dropouts, wars, and fashion controversy - unisex and mini-maxi controversies. Many of these find parallels in modern urban life.[55] Of course, this is in reference to those centuries when cities were walled and hierarchically organized. These cities were rather small by modern standards and were very much constricted. Babylon, the largest city of the area in its heyday, had a city wall only ten miles long. The houses of the common people were quite small, huddled together along very narrow streets. Garbage accumulated in the houses and there was no systematic way to remove the garbage and sewage. Instead, the city refuse was dumped outside the city walls, which formed a huge mound of filth. Human wastes were rarely carried further than the nearest street. It turned out to be a cesspool for all kinds of diseases. There was no means of eradicating the flies, rodents, mosquitoes and cockroaches. The water supply -- from wells, rivers, and canals -- was polluted, leading to frequent epidemics. Life expectancy was short, due in part to high infant mortality. Even air pollution was not absent. The atmosphere was filled with smoke, dust and offensive odors. Only a few bureaucrats and wealthy merchants could afford to live in comfort and luxury. They employed numerous slaves to serve them and indulged in all sorts of vain amusements.[56]

The lure of the urban life has drawn millions away from the drudgery and oppression of the countryside since the years of the ancient cities. Nevertheless, many cities of the present day, especially those in the Third World, do not live up to those expectations of

urban life. Life for the majority of the urbanites is anything but pleasure and ease. Urban societies breed their own unique problems, which are absent in rural agrarian societies. This was true in Sumer also. Except for a brief period, the image of "the golden age of ancient civilization" is a myth. Yes, the urban evolution did spawn advances in several fields -- human culture, arts, science, politics and jurisprudence. The urban economy did promote the accumulation of wealth and material prosperity. But those who benefited from the advances were a handful of the urban gentry -- the royalty, the ruling powers, bureaucrats, military establishment, merchants and those who owned large tracts of prime farmland. For the majority of the inhabitants -- laborers, artisans, and slaves – urban life was anything but luxurious.

Nature and Religion of the Lost Civilizations

During the first phase of the ancient cities, the religions of Sumer were largely in continuity with the agrarian polytheistic cults of the preceding epoch. Every city had its own patron deity and many of these were female in character. Polytheism was rampant, and the pantheon included some male deities as well. The agrarian ideology of fertility demanded a polytheistic stance of cooperation and mutuality between all forces in the universe, especially between male and female. There had to be the mating of the sky gods and the Earth Mother to assure the continued fecundity of nature and the prosperity of the agrarian societies. This was reflected in the fertility rite of sacred sex. Sacred sex probably originated in Sumer earlier than 3000 B.C.E. and lasted for nearly two thousand years. The basis for the ritual was the belief that fertility of the land and of people depended on the celebration of the sexual power of the fertility goddess.[57] The annual

symbolic reenactment of this mythical union – lovemaking between the high priest and priestess -- was a public celebration considered essential to the well being of the community. This symbolized the blessings invoked for a bountiful year of planting and harvesting. It was an occasion of celebration that involved orgy on the part of the worshipers in and around the temple grounds.[58] The Sacred Sex and Sacred Marriage were performed in the temples of various fertility-goddesses for nearly two thousand years. Many of the clay tablets found in Sumer contain love songs that depict the "Sacred Sex."[59] However, such a fervor and trust in the fecundity of the Mother Earth did not last beyond the first phase of the urban revolution.

During the second phase, the Sumerians went through a period of ambivalent religious existence that reflected their actual experience on the human-world front. The mutuality gave way to control and domination. Female deities were made subservient to the male deities. The monarch of the city now officiated the sacred sex ceremony on New Year's Eve and made love to the high priestess. It was a reflection of the changes humans confronted in their environment and in the society. The once benevolent nature was becoming unyielding. The region, which once could export surplus grain stocks to its neighbors, now began to suffer declining harvests. Society was becoming violent and oppressive. Relentless pillaging, plundering, and wars with neighboring cities kept the people on guard. The peace and prosperity, once enjoyed, was now only a memory. In this changing situation, the Sumerian religions underwent a drastic paradigm shift. The Sumerian people gradually lost confidence in the fertility motifs of the agrarian ideologies and cults. The mutualism and the partnership motifs of the agrarian mentality had to be replaced with other human-world motifs. The Earth Mother was becoming

barren. The Sumerians had to view the world of nature from a different angle. For the first time, nature was losing its appeal and enchantment. It needed to be controlled and harnessed.

The declining crop yields made people look at terrestrial nature with some disdain. For them, the wilderness was unruly and a source of disillusionment. The Euphrates and Tigris ran wild and often changed course. The annual inundation, between April and June, came at a time when the winter crop was not yet ripe and the summer crop was still in the ground.[60] The floods wiped away the cities repeatedly with no warning. The dikes and the dams needed constant plugging. The ditches and the canals needed constant dredging. Frequent dust storms blinded the eyes. Sandstorms decimated the crops and buried the cities. The desert weather was extreme. Extreme variations between the day and night temperatures made life exacting. In summer the mercury often climbed beyond 125 degrees Fi, and in winter it dipped below freezing point. Summertime evaporation increased the salinity of the soil. The marshier regions of the Tigris-Euphrates delta were the scenes of a constant battle between crop-sustaining flows of freshwater and salt-water infiltrating from the Persian Gulf.[61] The land was flat, unwooded, devoid of esthetic landscapes. Paul Shepard writes,

> The desert is a powerful, unique sensorium. Silence and emptiness are the ambiguous descriptions of sounds and landforms. The desert is at once a place of sensory deprivation and awesome overload -- too little life, too much heat, too little water, too much sky. . . . and yet the desert evokes the terrors of the inferno. The distance and scale, the sweep between horizons and the loftiness of stars, its winds and mirages, its hidden life and conspicuous shapes seem at once to dwarf and to emphasize the human figure. Its sensory impact is profoundly stimulating and disturbing, a massive shock to the human limbic system -- the neural basis of emotional response -- which seems to demand some logic or interpretation.[62]

Terrestrial nature was no longer a friend of humans. It was sterile and dying. It was also menacing, and humans fled from it, into the security of the walled cities.

But that was only part of the story. Like all desert communities, Sumerians were keen observers and their senses were attuned to the totality of their universe, especially to the celestial displays and order. True, the world of the daytime was a burning inferno. Desert nomads and herders were forced to take shelter in the tents and oases. Yet the evenings and the nights bring out the grandeur of the celestial skies. The grandeur and the majesty of the night skies lift the weary souls and spur the mind to metaphysical quest and banter. Human senses that are dormant during the day come alive in the evening and the nights. Habitually, everyone looks up into starlit skies and is captivated by the splendor, the consistency, and the order of the celestial world. The heavenly bodies -- sun, moon and stars -- run their courses unfailingly. Constellations conjure up symmetries and sketches for models and street plans. The patterns and contours of stars and planets depict the human story on earth. No wonder Mesopotamians excelled in mathematics and astronomy, and gave the world its first calendar.

The beauty of the desert nights and the constancy of the celestial bodies are quite contrary to the chaos of their terrestrial world. The implications of these two were obvious to the Mesopotamian mentality. One does not fail to compare the order and grandeur of the celestial space with the chaos of nature below. The universe appears as polarities of opposing forces. The call of the universe is quite clear. The celestial order must be imposed over terrestrial chaos. The chaotic nature out there should be ordered, controlled and subdued. This order must be established through the exercise of the power

of the bureaucrats over peasants, women and artisans. The predatory warring tribes must be silenced or annihilated by the sword.

The creation myths of Sumer and Babylon exude the essence of the desert gestalts, which if summarized would read that order and genius could be introduced into the chaotic world through domination and control. Humans are called upon to bring about this order in nature. The Epic of Gilgamesh, which dates from the second millennium B.C.E., was perhaps the first to advance this ideology of the desert gestalt. It recounts the strength and exploits of Gilgamesh and his friend Enkidu. Gilgamesh, who established Uruk as the supreme city in Mesopotamia, was thought to be two-thirds divine and one-third human. Enkidu on the other hand was a wild human-animal who lived in the forests. Gilgamesh tamed and redeemed Enkidu from his animal existence and transformed him into a true human being. Gilgamesh and Enkidu became friends. Having become inseparable, Gilgamesh and Enkidu went out to kill Humbaba, the mighty god and guardian of the Cedar Forests. After killing Humbaba, Gilgamesh and Enkidu returned to the city of Uruk for a life of peace and serenity.

The Epic of Gilgamesh in essence, shows the triumph of humans over nature, firmly establishing the role of humans as the wardens of creation. Nature is no longer a friend of humans as was the case in the primal and archaic agrarian societies, but an ominous foe to be subdued and controlled. Humans had to flee the wilderness into the cities. This ancient legend described an actual ecological event; the cedars of Lebanon, after centuries of exploitation and export to all the surrounding lands, disappeared except for a few small groves, leaving the hillsides open to severe erosion.[63] Clive Ponting states that 80 per cent of the forests in the Fertile Crescent have been decimated since the founding

of the Sumerian cities.[64] Thus, the Sumerian myths and cults reflected the alienation of humans from nature. Now humans must bend the earth to human purpose. Urban existence was rationalized as bringing order into otherwise chaotic terrestrial life. The need to establish order both in terrestrial nature and in society was quite apparent to the Mesopotamians. They developed astrology, astronomy, mathematics and the calendar merely by observing the predictable and constant motions of the sun, moon, stars and planets. Such ideas were utilized in imposing orderly designs in their cities, walls and alleys, canals and fields, homes and gardens.[65] The archaic deities were recast into characters that sanctioned order, guarded the city gates, upheld government and the hierarchical society, and encouraged the construction of works that would reproduce on chaotic earth the orderly patterns of the starlit skies and the regularity of the heavenly bodies. Such an order cannot occur through archaic voluntarism and mutualism, but must be achieved through coercive means of domination and control. Earth Mother was reduced to being the Great Wife, or even one of the consorts in the male god's harem. No longer the mutuality between the sky gods and the earth deities, but the forced assault by the former on the latter alone would ensure continued fecundity. Donald Hughes writes,

> The attitude of the peoples of Mesopotamia toward nature, from early Sumerian writings down through the Akkadian and Assyrian literatures, is marked by a strong feeling of battle. Nature herself was represented in Mesopotamian mythology as monstrous chaos, and it was only by the constant labors of people and their patron gods that chaos could be overcome and order established.[66]

The disposition of confrontation reflected in Sumerian writings is more reflective of the realities that existed during the third and the second millennium B.C.E.

The Sumerian cults envisioned an order in the universe in the midst of chaos – an order maintained by strict hierarchy. The Sun, the moon, the stars, the planets, the sky, the air, the earth -- all stand in order according to their prominence. The most prominent and consistent body was set at the top of the ladder while the most chaotic was pushed to the bottom. The Ziggurats of Mesopotamia reflect this hierarchy. The pantheon of deities, numbering in the hundreds, supervised the universe. They were hierarchically ordered. At the top were four chief deities: the rulers of sky, earth, air, and sea. *An*, the sky god, was the oldest and highest of all the gods. *Enlil* was the god of air and storm. He was in a sense the storm itself, the second greatest power of the visible universe, second only to the sky above him. Storm in the desert? What kind of a storm was it? Could *Enlil* have come to represent the destructive sandstorms that frequented the regions of Sumer and Mesopotamia? The following hymn in honor of *Enlil* may point to the importance of such storms.

> Enlil called the storm. The people mourn.
> Exhilarating winds he took from the land. The people mourn.
> Good winds he took away from Shumer. The people mourn.
> He summoned evil winds. The people mourn.
> Entrusted them to Kingaluda, tender of storms.
>
> He called the storm that will annihilate the land. The people mourn.
> He called disastrous winds. The people mourn.
> Enlil – choosing Gibil as his helper,
> Called the (great) hurricane of heaven. The people mourn.
>
> The (binding) hurricane howling across the skies, -- The people mourn –
> The shattering storm roaring across the land – The people mourn.
> The tempest which, relentless as a floodwave,
> Beats down upon, devours the city's ships,
> All these he gathered at the base of heaven. The people mourn.
> (Great) fires he lit that heralded the storm. The people mourn.
> And lit on either flank of furious winds, the searing heat of desert.
> Like flaming heat of noon this fire scorched.

> The storm ordered by Enlil in hate, the storm which wears away the country,
> Covered Ur like a cloth, enveloped it like a linen sheet.
>
> On that day did the storm leave the city; that city was a ruin.
> O father Nanna, that town was left a ruin. The people mourn.
> On that day did the storm leave the country. The people mourn.
>
> (Dead) men, not potsherds, covered the approaches.
> The walls were gaping.
> The high gates, the roads, were piled with dead.
> In the wide streets, where feasting crowds would gather,
> Scattered they lay.
> In all the streets and roadways bodies lay.
> In open fields that used to fill with dancers, they lay in heaps.
> The country's blood now filled its holes, like metal in a mold;
> Bodies dissolved—like fat left in the sun.[67]

Next to *Enlil* was *Enki,* the god of the waters and of wisdom. *Ninhursag* was the Mother Earth from whom issued all living things. *Tiamat* was the mother of all gods, and she was associated with saltwater.

In the same way, human society is to be ordered. The most chaotic members of the society -- women and slaves -- must be cast to the bottom of the scale. Monarchs, priests and bureaucrats stand above the common people -- the artisans, farm laborers, and slaves. Projecting onto their rulers a concern for high moral conduct, the Sumerians developed an extensive system of law codes and civic behavior. In fact, the writing down of moral, social, religious and legal codes was one of the most important contributions Sumerian societies made to human cultural advance.[68] The concept of a divine-law-giver – an idea central to Jewish scriptures and theology – grew out of this ethos. Codes of written laws were meant to establish order in the society and to establish the status quo of the rulers, priests and bureaucrats. Sumerians thought that order must come to reflect the order existing in the skies. Not only Sumerians but many ancient societies held that the

monarchs and priests were mandated to be the custodians and enforcers of the divine law in a society which if left to itself would be unruly and chaotic.

Summary

The saga of the rise and fall of ancient civilizations is a lesson in religion and the environment. The environmental problems encountered by ancient Mesopotamians colored their religious views. They reflected how ancient urban societies caught up in the growing ecology crisis would order their lives and deal with nature. Ancient Sumerians were also equally responsible for intensifying the ecology crisis within their own biological niches. These ancient urbanites were hopelessly sold on the agrarian and urban ideologies that fostered the mania of fertility and domination. Nevertheless, these urban cults were unable to show a way out of the environmental and social predicaments. Donald Hughes concludes,

> It is significant that the first urban societies were also the first societies to abandon a religious attitude of oneness with nature and to adopt one of separation. The dominant myth and reality in Mesopotamia was the conquest of chaotic nature by divine-human order. Such societies, it must be noted, were ultimately unsuccessful in maintaining a balance with their natural environment.[69]

The final phase of the ancient civilization saw the collapse of the ancient civilization and the rise of imperialism. A good many of the cities collapsed around 2,200 B.C.E. due to the severe sandstorms and aridity that visited this region. The protective walls around the cities could no longer protect the people against the onslaughts of the sandstorms and the attacking marauders. These cities also collapsed under the weight of their own environmental and social excess and were buried in the desert by sandstorms and flooding. For over four thousand years they remained buried beneath the desert

sands until archeologists of the last century uncovered them. Those few that survived were incorporated as satellite centers of the rising nation-states and empires. Imperialism was a new phenomenon on the political scene. Walled cities were no mach for its onslaughts. Imperialism ushered in a new eco-social paradigm that had enormous consequence not only for the environment and for the society, but also for the rise of axial revolution that caused the rise of new religious traditions in the ancient world.

Notes
Chapter 6
The Rise and Fall of Ancient Civilizations

1 Miller, Living in the Environment, 47.

2 Mark J. McDonnell and Steward T. A. Pickett, eds. Human as Components of Ecosystems (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1993), 316. ← You need to cite the specific article rather than giving the edited vol.

3 Shepard, Nature and Madness, 48.

4 See discussion in Anthony P. Andrews, First Cities (Montreal: St. Remy Press, 1995), 11.

5 Eisler, The Chalice and the Blade, 9-10.

6 James Mellaart, The Neolithic of the Near East (New York: Scribner, 1975), 276.

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31 Ponting, 71.

32 Eisler, 42-58.

33 Wink, 37.

34 Paul Shepard, "~~The~~ Eclectic Primitive," ~~(Unpublished Paper)~~, 25.

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36 Eisler, 66-73.

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48 Ibid., 57.

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50 Mumford, ~~Transformation of Man~~, 50.

51 Ponting, 72.

52 Claiborne, 279-80.

53 Ponting, 58; Lerner, 56-57.

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56 Hughes, 30-31.

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59 Kramer, 303-24.

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CHAPTER 7

Imperial Existence and the Axial Negativity toward Nature

The Epic of Gilgamesh, to which we alluded previously, is a poignant index to the Sumerians' experience of their environment, on the one hand, and the changes that were taking place in their environment on the other. The epic describes a time when the region abounded in fauna, woodlands and grass cover. The ancient humans' choice to migrate, settle down, and build "The First Cities" in this region shows that Sumer and its vicinity resembled Eden-like existence before urbanization saturated this region. As we showed, the rise and fall of ancient civilizations was influenced both by the changes in the global climate that effected local bioregions and the human intervention in the biological niches. By the time the Epic of Gilgamesh became a household fable in Sumer, the environment around Sumer had changed drastically. Hunting became rare and the savannas had retreated. Obviously, something had gone wrong. The bounteous environment depicted in the epic was no longer in existence anywhere near Sumer at the time of committing the epic to writing.

Nevertheless, hunting was a favorite pastime of the princes and chieftains even in imperial times. Archeological reliefs uncovered at the sites of ancient cities of Egypt, Assyria and Babylon depict hunting expeditions undertaken by the royals in patches of woodland and savanna remaining in remote pockets. For the primal people, hunting was an essential way of life. For archaic agrarians, it was important for subsistence. For urbanites, hunting became a luxury and an amusement affordable only by palace people and the rich. To offset the loss of game the ancient royals also collected and caged exotic

species of animals and birds in palace menageries. These became a regular feature of the Ancient Near East. Zoos originated in the ancient cities of that region. Reliefs of the Assyrian palace of Ashurnasirpal II include elephants, monkeys, bears, rare deer and Mediterranean Sea creatures like dolphins and seals. Karen Polinger Foster notes,

> Throughout the entire period in both areas [Egypt and Mesopotamia], ample written records – on clay tablets, papyri, and tomb and palace walls – describe how kings and sometimes other power brokers made zoos and gardens for pleasure and prestige and to satisfy scientific curiosity.[1]

Periodically, these animals were put on show and paraded through the city streets. The penchant for maintaining menageries and gardens at the imperial quarters in the ancient cities indicates vanishing woodlands and the advance of deserts. As human societies crossed successive thresholds, environmental degradation became more pronounced and widespread.

Ancient societies were aware of the changes taking place in their environment. But, they were oblivious to the actual causes of the ecological degradation that was happening all around them. They did not see the nexus between the larger planetary events and the changes they confronted in their bioregions. On the other hand, environmental crisis in the local regions was also caused by human abuse of nature and ancient human societies were oblivious to this as well. The Epic of Gilgamesh reflects this ignorance on the environmental facts of life. However, the epic provides us with a poignant description of the green history of the Ancient Near East. Not only the Epic of Gilgamesh, many other ancient near-Eastern epics, legends, texts, murals and poetry offer clues to understanding the green history of the Fertile Crescent. The stories of the Garden of Eden and the Flood are cases in point. The Wisdom literature (whose historical context has been an enigma

to the students of ancient texts) seems to fall within the genre of classics prompted by the ecological events of the ancient world. These readings and evidences from archaeology, ancient religious cults, paleo-botany and what we now know about the change of planet's climate from early to mid-Holocene period enable us to draw some broad conclusions.

1. Sumer and others ancient societies on the margins of the Arabian deserts and highlands were painfully aware of the environmental calamities that visited their regions. They agonized over the environmental failures they confronted and they knew that something was very wrong on the environmental front.
2. But these ancient societies did not understand it as an ecological crisis (as we would understand it). They were also largely oblivious to the actual (human and nonhuman) causes that brought about the environmental calamities of their surroundings. They were not aware that the crisis was due to the astral changes and the change of planet's climate.
3. To overcome the failing economies – the diminishing returns from the hunting-gathering and agrarian-herding pursuits – ancient societies devised strategies for enlarging and intensifying their subsistence activities. Techniques like hydraulic irrigation and ploughs were developed in ancient Mesopotamia.
4. Ancient cities also came under increasing attack from their neighbors and nomadic tribes looking for food and resources. In order to protect their food stocks and cities from pillagers and marauders, they were forced to build walls and raise standing armies. These strategies drained the society's resources and made the cities more vulnerable to failures.

5. Nevertheless, being grounded as they were to a religious view of nature, ancient societies interpreted the growing environmental calamities as the displeasure of the gods on humans. Since archaic agrarian-pastoral cults were committed to the ideology of fecundity, any failure on the agrarian-pastoral fronts was interpreted as the failure of humans to meet the demands of the nature deities. The cultic exercises sought to appease the demands of these fertility gods.
6. The fall of ancient civilizations may thus be attributed both to the wider environmental changes and the human intervention in a failing environment with strategies that worsened the environmental crisis further.
7. Seen in this light, human excesses on nature from primal to archaic times must be viewed as uninformed human responses to the changing environment caused by larger planetary events.

The epoch that followed the fall of ancient civilizations – the epoch of the rise of empires -- presents us with a different scenario. Prior to 6000 B.C.E., the Northern Hemisphere experienced copious rainfall and lush vegetation. From 6,000 to 3000 B.C.E., rainfall declined and deserts advanced. The second half of the third millennium B.C.E. brought severe aridity and repeated dust storms. These calamities led to the collapse of the agrarian and pastoral economic base of the ancient cities. From the fall of ancient civilizations to the present time, there were hardly any changes in the climatic patterns of the planet. If that was the case, the environmental changes that have occurred since that time have to be seen from a different angle. Environmental changes of the past five millennia have been more extensive, intrusive and destructive than those which had

occurred in any earlier epochs of the human presence on the planet. Wider planetary forces did little to extend the crisis. As such, we may safely infer that the human presence and activities of the societies immediately preceding and succeeding ancient civilizations were largely responsible for the worsening of the ecological crisis and the breakdown of societies of the ancient world.

The last two millennia B.C.E. witnessed one of the tumults epochs of human history. There was widespread discontentment with life in general. The overall health and welfare of human societies was on the decline. Such a scenario confronts us with some brainteasers. From when and where did humans come to acquire a negative disposition toward nature? Was it fomented in the ethos of environmental and social crisis of the first few millennia B.C.E.? Contrarily, did the human negativity toward nature aggravate the environmental crisis that was already in the offing?

The pre-axial epochs saw the evolution of distinct modes of human societies – tribal societies, agrarian villages, feudal societies, nomadic and semi-nomadic herding communities, city-states and empires. In the initial stages, there was considerable overlap between these emerging modes of polities. It was difficult to tell the difference among them and their boundaries shifted constantly. As time went by, a clear pattern emerged and a few of them came to play dominant roles in shaping human societal evolution and awareness. They could be identified by the modes of their human-world existences and the worldviews and ideologies they fostered.

By the advent of the axial age, two modes of societies – city-states and empires – were firmly established and operational. Much that went into the making of axial thoughts and awareness were derived from their ideologies. A primitive form of nation-state polity did

emerge and survive briefly in places like Israel and Egypt. But these lands also fell victim to the overriding impacts of the imperial forces. A decisive pattern of nation-state polity could emerge only in the recent centuries. Nevertheless, the vision for a viable nation-state existence did grow in the midst of the ambivalence of the growing imperialism. In essence, the axial paradigm came to reflect the dialectics of urbanism, imperialism and an ethnocentric nationalism of the first few millennia B.C.E. The continuities and the contradictions of their gestalts, ideologies and worldviews shaped the axial revolution. It did not mean that the gestalts derivative from other modes of human society – primal, tribal, archaic agrarian and pastoral societies – were shutoff completely. In fact, the residues of these earlier gestalts and ideologies lie in the background as foundations over which these new social polities were overlaid. Axial environmental disposition, particularly the human negativity toward nature, was informed by a mix of these gestalts – residues of primal, archaic agrarian and pastoral, and tribal motifs, and the urban and imperial ideologies of the first few millennia B.C.E. In Chapter 6, we looked at an example of the city-states of Sumer. In Chapter 8, we will take a close look at the sagas of three lands that came under the influence of these modes of polities and their gestalts. In this chapter, we discuss briefly the rise of empires during the last two millennia B.C.E. and its implication for the axial negativity toward nature.

The Rise of Empires and the Environment

Most ancient cities and towns at the core centers evolved into some form of city-state polity. It was a new social paradigm that became a viable alternative to tribal and agrarian societies. Sumerian society was the first to emerge as a city-state. Greece,

before and during the classical times, was known for its city-states. The evolution of city-state from archaic towns and villages caused the concentration of social power into the hands of a privileged few. Those who acquired power subjugated the common people. They created urban environments and lived in them. The elite – the monarch, the bureaucracy, the temple administration, the educated and the armies -- were all lodged in the cities. Life in the city was preferred to the drudgery of the agrarian countryside. Many axial philosophers and prophets lived and worked in cities. Socrates fell in love with city life. He wrote, "I am a lover of knowledge, and the men who dwell in the city are my teachers, not the trees or the countryside."[2]

Nevertheless, ancient cities of Sumer and Greece were vulnerable to many failures from within and without. In terms of the weakness of their core, ancient urban centers, especially those of the closing phase, were found to be vulnerable to breakdowns due to the weight of their own power structures. The social and the environmental base of the city-states were rather weak and constricted. Urban societies were organized hierarchically -- with a top-heavy bureaucracy serviced by the common people. The palace, temples, aristocrats and armies expended a large share of the community resources. Common people -- agrarians, artisans, and slaves -- had little to live by and their life was one of misery and toil. Ancient cities did not have a large economic base that could sustain the bureaucracy and standing armies for a long period.

Unlike modern cities, which thrive by drawing resources from far and near, ancient cities were largely limited by their dependence on their immediate agrarian and pastoral economies. Cities of Sumer thrived largely on the agrarian economy while the cities of Greece flourished on mining, industry and trading. When these economies floundered,

the cities failed. These ancient cities sought to enlarge their economic base. But there were severe limitations to such extensions. Especially the cities on the desert frontiers were severely restricted by their ability to channel the river-waters to distant fields. The only option open was for these societies to abandon their cities or dominate and pillage their neighbors. Greek cities also suffered severe setbacks when their mining and farming economies failed. But they did not completely disintegrate, as they sought to draw resources from distant regions by establishing trading colonies all over the Mediterranean world and maritime trade with their neighbors from eighth century B.C.E.[3] The failing environment together with the growing population forced these city-states to seek other modes of political existence that could ensure their continued survival. It was at this stage that we witness the rise of imperialism. While many cities at the core centers collapsed and vanished, some managed to survive. The dominant ones (with large standing armies) raided their neighbors and integrated their economies into their own. Smaller cities in the far-flung regions were subdued and incorporated as satellite outposts. Thus we find imperialism thriving in regions where the environment and the societies were failing.

The age of imperialism began with the Akkadian Empire of Sargon, 2340 B.C.E. With the fall of the Akkadian Empire, a series of empires emerged to torment the Fertile Crescent. Hittites, Syrians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Medes, Persians, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans and Turks – all waged wars for the control of the Fertile Crescent and the Levant to gain access to wealth and food resources. The imperial economy and power could not be sustained solely by relying on the local and national economies. Economies of the city-states were already in disarray. When the local economy failed, the central powers

sought to expand their resource base by conquering and pillaging provinces near and far. By doing so, their central cities were assured a dependable supply of food and resources from the conquered regions. Imperialism was also driven by the human penchant for power, luxury, and aggrandizement. Egoistic ambitions and desire for self-aggrandizement and power by the emperors, monarchs and soldiers also drove many of these conquests and imperial expansions. Imperialism respects no borders and shows no concern for peoples' identities and the integrity of their land and its bioregions. For Sargon and his successors, neither the integrity of the bioregions, nor the national, ethnic, religious and cultural unity of the people was of concerns. Sargon subjugated all independent minded Sumerian cities and brought them under a central rule.

As we said earlier, the boundaries between city-states and empires overlapped considerably. But the imperial tendency -- extending one's power and territory beyond bioregional and ethnic constrictions -- as clearly visible in most ancient conflicts. The failure of the agrarian economies and the widespread ecology crisis brought about by the changes in the climate added to such offensive measures. We see these expansions taking place in Egypt, India, China and elsewhere. Ancient Egypt experienced frequent food shortages caused by low flood levels of the Nile. The temple towns that were independent came under frequent attack from neighbors seeking food and other resources. This led to political instability. The Pharaohs eventually unified the warring cities under a central rule and made Memphis the prime city of Egypt around 3000 B.C.E.

The same process – the failing environment triggering imperial advances -- developed in India much later -- from the Sixth Century B.C.E. when the Mauryan Empire emerged. Ashoka (273-232 B.C.E.), the third Mauryan emperor, is known for instituting and

propagating Buddhist ways of life throughout his empire. Nevertheless, Ashoka's empire was created by ruthless suppression of all independent minded provinces. Ashoka's campaigns might also have been motivated partly by the failure of the environment. One of his many rock edicts depicts the grim environmental scene of his times.

> Beloved-of-the Gods, King Piyadasi, has caused this Dhamma edict to be written. Here (in my domain) no living beings are to be slaughtered or offered in sacrifice . . . . Formerly, in the kitchen of Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, hundreds of thousands of animals were killed every day to make curry. But now with the writing of this Dhamma edict only three creatures, two peacocks and a deer are killed, and the deer not always. And in time, not even these three creatures will be killed.[4]

This edict suggests an environment that was failing. The forests were retreating. The game animals were becoming scarcer. Whether the environmental crisis was caused by human pressures or by changes in the climate is not quite clear. What is clear of course was that the imperialism advanced where the environment was already failing.

Imperialism and the Ideology of Alienation

One of the consequences of the rising imperialism was the alienation of people from the environment and from their societies. Imperialism indeed survives on alienating people from their environment and society. This alienation in turn aggravated the environmental crisis that was already in the offing during the first millennium B.C.E. In Green History, the dialectics of alienation has a disquieting connotation. Alienation severs people's oneness with the land.

The alienation forced by imperialism was different from the alienation caused without coercive means. Prolonged famine, starvation and migration were causes that alienated people from nature. Mass migration due to famine was quite common in the ancient

world. The failure of agrarian and pastoral economies caused severe food shortages and the resulting migration of societies. Scores of expatriate settlements were found all over the Fertile Crescent and the Eastern Mediterranean lands from time to time. Ironically, the epoch of mass migration was also an epoch that saw the rise of imperialism and escalation of warfare. While the growing environmental crisis caused mass migration, the spread of imperialism and the attending atrocities also caused forced and voluntary migration of societies from region to region. The rising imperialism and the warfare also caused the desertion of ancient cities.

The Bible contains sagas on the migration of people from region to region in the ancient world. The migration of Abraham and his clan from Haran, a town in north Mesopotamia, to Canaan, as recorded in Genesis 12:1-6, is believed to have taken place in the eighteenth century B.C.E. when there was a prolonged famine in the land.[5] According to Clive Ponting, this was a period when the crop yield had fallen below 65 per cent of the earlier normal output in upper and lower Mesopotamian regions.[6] Scholars suggest that Abraham may have been a contemporary of the Amorite King Hammurabi (c.1728-1686), who established the Babylonian kingdom.[7] Was it the environmental crisis or the spread of imperialism that caused the migration of Abraham and his family? In the seventeenth century B.C.E., we see another patriarch, Jacob, and his household migrating from Palestine into Egypt during the period of the Theban Dynasty.[8] The stories of Abraham, Jacob and Joseph reflect the reality of the declining food resources, mass migration and the spread of imperial warfare. Egypt at this time had comfortable grain reserves. It was one of those regions that were relatively free from warfare. Patriarchs and their tribes sought refuge in Egypt from the famine of their own

region. Western Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean lands experienced these environmental migrations on a massive scale beginning about 2,000 B.C.E. The Aryan thrust into the Indus valley region also began in the second millennium B.C.E. The widespread drought and the declining resource base in the Indo-Persian regions perhaps caused their onward migration into India.[9] Not all migrating societies were environmental refugees, nor were they clement. The migrating Aryans were a semi-nomadic pastoral people known for their brutality. It is speculated that on their onward thrust into the Indus valley, Aryans might have caused the untimely demise of the flourishing and peaceful urban centers of Harappa and Mohenjo Daro.

The success of imperialism depended on alienating people from their land. The primitive imperialism employed the tactics of forced migration and deportation of people from one region to another. It was undertaken for two reasons. First, the imperial powers required humanpower to move the economic engines of imperialism. Through enslaving the vanquished enemies and deporting able-bodied men and women to the foreign lands, imperial powers were able to acquire manpower to work the fields and dig the channels. The conquests and campaign resulted in large-scale enslavement of people for forced labor. All imperial societies depended on slave labor.[10] During the first few centuries B.C.E., one out of every three person was either a slave or an indentured laborer and most of them were expatriates. The Bible recounts how the armies of Assyria, Babylon and Egypt plundered Israel and carried away its people. Captives were resettled "by the rivers of Babylon" and made to dig and dredge the irrigation canals.[11] Ancient Egyptians and Greeks brought in captives and slaves to work on massive public building projects and private farms and estates.

Secondly, this technique of forced deportation and exchange of peoples was adopted to prevent possible revolt and rebellion among the conquered nations and vassal states. Temples in the central cities of the vanquished states were burnt and destroyed. Peoples were deported and exchanged from one end of the region to the other so that their identity and history would be erased and the affinity to their homeland severed. The imperial powers reasoned that the empire would become cohesive enough to be governable from the center.

This massive displacement of people through forced deportation and migration of people from region to region started with the Akkadian Empire of Sargon. It became a standard strategy and practice executed by all ancient empires. In the 300 years of its existence, the Assyrian Empire forcibly deported about four-and-a-half million people all across the Fertile Crescent region, and by doing so the Assyrians were able to establish political control over vanquished nations and city-states.[12] Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans similarly enslaved and deported groups within their empires. The captivity of the Jews in Babylon and the subsequent Diaspora were part of this imperial design.[13]

Expatriation of people also occurred through other means. Ancient Greeks, for instance, setup trading colonies all over the Mediterranean coasts during the first millennium B.C.E.[14] With the spread of Greek imperialism, Hellenic towns and colonies were set up all over the Levant and the Fertile Crescent. Following the breakdown of the Greek empire, the Roman Empire built numerous garrison station all across the empire.[15] These colonial powers had no interest in the health of the environment of the colonies and their natives. They were mainly interested in collecting taxes and extracting vast

quantities of food stock and resources to sustain legions and officials stationed in the garrison forts throughout the Roman Empire. Expatriates on the foreign soil themselves are alienated people. Whether they were the ruling powers or captives or slaves or traders -- they all lived as aliens amidst alien cultures. None of the great empires -- Akkadians, Assyrians, Egyptians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and Romans -- had any empathy for the environment of the provinces, nor any appreciation for the cultures of the natives. Imperial powers were interested in amassing wealth for their own aristocrats, armies and bureaucrats in their central cities and garrison stations. As alienated people, they sought to alienate the natives from their lands and cultures.

Thirdly, while the growing environmental degradation caused the advance of imperialism in the ancient world, the advance of imperialism itself worsened the environmental crisis and caused severe disruption of societies. The survival of Sumerian cities required continued expansion of their economic base. International trade and commerce were yet to be fully developed to be able to exchange goods and services. The expanding economic base meant predatory existence – competing for scarce resources and pillaging one's neighbors. Warfare was the only means for competing for scarce resources. Primitive imperialism in essence was an expansion of the economic base through warfare.

The expansion of the economic base through warfare suggests certain socio-political realities. Imperialism was motivated by the need to ensure the wealth and power of the ruling class – the emperor, his courtiers, and armies -- and to gain access to dependable food resources in the midst of the failing environment and economies of the city and nation states. Mogens Trolle Larsen sums this up graphically as "a huge military and

administrative apparatus designed to secure a constant flow of goods from the periphery to the center."[16] Imperial ideology is based on the motif that "those who gain access to resources acquire social and political power and those who hold social and political power gain easy access to resources." Resources in the ancient world were largely food resources and food had become scarce. How could these ancient societies assure themselves of a dependable supply of food other than resorting to brute force of the soldiery?

Source of quote is unclear — add a note

Power belonged to those who could gain access to scarce resources. During the primal epoch, power was diffused, because no one had a monopoly over resources. Everyone in the community had equal access to all resources of the community and in the environment and resources were plentiful. Violence against fellow humans was mild and conflicts were rare. In the archaic agrarian society and during the early phase of urban developments, temples and shrines exercised monopoly over communal resources. There was no market economy and the religious sites served as the centers for economic and material exchanges. During the pre-walled era, temple-towns rarely engaged in violence against their neighbors. It was only when the urban economies floundered that we see warfare becoming a way of life. Cities quickly erected walls and raised armies to ward off marauders as well as go on the offensive to plunder the neighboring territories and cities. Warfare as a means of acquiring resources and wealth was at the root of primitive imperialism. It was in the Ancient Near East that we come across warfare becoming a means for survival. It was there that the ancient military science was perfected and thoroughly organized.[17] Wheel chariots were introduced for the first time in ancient warfare in Sumer as early as 2800 B.C.E.[18] Students of ancient history are puzzled by the

sudden escalation of warfare at the core centers of civilization around the second millennium B.C.E. Some of them conclude that the human penchant for power and expansion drove many of these ancient societies to war. But human penchant for power alone does not explain the sudden escalation of warfare. We have to see the escalation of warfare in the context of widespread environmental crises and the competition for scarce resources. The failure of agrarian and pastoral economies as well as the population pressures pushed many ancient cities to resort to warfare to gain access to resources.

Population pressure in the midst of failing rural and urban economies meant finding gainful occupation for all able bodied men. Ancient societies did not have large employment schemes or public projects that would absorb all idle hands. The only available avenues were the services at the palace and in the military. Imperial armies were the largest employers in the ancient world. Militarism was a major economic enterprise. It is quite astounding how the ancient imperial powers were able to mobilize and maintain huge armies in the midst of a failing environment and economy. Assyria in its heyday seems to have mobilized the largest army of the ancient Near East. It fielded anywhere between 100,000 to 200,000.[19] Standing armies require enormous organization of men and material. The logistics of mobilizing, maintaining and marching huge armies of infantry, cavalry and the support services meant expending vast amount of food stocks and resources. Every soldier on the battlefield was serviced by five other support persons who attended to his physical needs. When imperial armies marched and camped from place to place, surrounding towns and rural areas were drained of their food stocks and resources. Much of these resources were acquired through coercive force and the threat of violence. Marching these huge armies for years on end, from place to place, disrupted

the rural and urban economies and aggravated the environmental crisis that was in the offing.

On the other hand, it has to be noted that without the use of warfare, primitive imperialism had no chance of success. Military grand strategies had to be refined and executed for extending the empire and maintaining loyalty and unity among the provinces. Empires brokeup easily due to frequent revolts and terrorism in the provinces. To quell the rebellion and keep the vassals in check, the imperial powers had to keep their armies on the move constantly and adopt savage tactics. These were meant to strike terror in the hearts of conquered people and keep the rebellion in check. The imperial armies subjected the conquered peoples and captives to all kinds of brutalities and inhuman treatment. The cities and temples were burnt. Captured enemies were killed; men were blinded and their limps cutoff; women were carried off to provide sexual services; children were sold as slaves. Assyrians excelled in the art of imperial savagery. To keep their subjects in check, Assyrian kings openly advertised their savage tactics and military retaliation for acts of disloyalty. An inscription at the royal residence of Assurnasirpal II relates the brutal vengeance meted out to the rebellious city of Suru.

> In the valor of my heart and with the fury of my weapons I stormed the city. All the rebels they seized and delivered them up. . . . I flayed all the chief men who had revolted, and I covered the pillar with their skins; some I walled up within the pillar, some I impaled upon the pillar on stakes, and others I bound to stakes round about the pillar; many within the border of my own land I flayed, and I spread their skins upon the walls; and I cut off the limbs of the officers, of the royal officers who had rebelled. Ahiababa I took to Nineveh, I flayed him, I spread his skin upon the wall of Nineveh.[20]

Not only Assyria but also other imperial powers that swept across the Fertile Crescent exhibited such savagery and cruelty. Savagery, slavery, mass deportation, and alienation

of people from their land, society and culture – these were the grand strategies of the imperialism of the first millennium B.C.E. Imperial warfare in the ancient world thus not only worsened the environmental crisis, but disrupted the economies of rural villages, towns, city-and-nation-states and ultimately devastated them. The economies of the nation-states in the region of the Levant and the Fertile Crescent were left in shambles. The overpowering force of imperialism was such that that these nation-states could not reverse the growing decline of their environment and society. During the centuries of imperial advances, we witness a general decline in the artistic, intellectual and cultural achievements. Local arts and crafts suffered a setback. Instead, imperialism advanced despotic central and provincial governments and diverted massive resources to the production of weapons and maintaining standing armies.

Imperialism and the Axial Negativity toward Nature

It is easy to see why negativity toward nature and life in general would grow in such alienated surroundings. The advent of the axial age followed closely on the heals of the rise of imperialism. The axial movement readily absorbed a mixed bag of motifs and ideologies brought to it by primitive imperialism. These consisted of stances that were both complementary and contradictory, negative and positive. Anti-nature stances, androcentrism, hierarchy, dualism, individualism, class structure, collectivism, universalism, militarism and colonialism – all were engendered by the advance of imperialism. On the other hand, primitive imperialism dismantled the archaic habits of human existence -- ethnocentrism, parochialism, regionalism, lingualism, nationalism,

dynastic histories, and communalism. The advance of imperialism pushed many ancient human societies to a new level of human existence and awareness.

Imperialism was indeed a new social paradigm. Unlike the archaic and city-state ideologies that were grounded on the land, its people and their history, the ideology of imperialism could not be grounded on any historical or material realities. Imperial gestalts themselves were engendered in the context of domination over and confrontation with the environment and societies. These did not fit well with the environmental ethos of the vassal city-nation-states on the fringes of the Fertile Crescent. Many of these societies still depended on the benevolence of nature, whereas the environments of the imperial centers were failing due to human abuse. Besides, deities of any one nation could not be simply exported and transplanted on an alien soil. Ethnic and national histories of the imperialists could also not be easily stamped over the histories of the vassal states and provinces. Those who pursued imperial ambitions themselves were for the most part alienated people -- alienated from their own native countryside and the common people.

Nevertheless, imperial ideologies needed a world grounding that transcended ethnic, national and environmental limitations. Such a grounding had to begin, as it were, in re-arranging the power-base of the nation-states and communities. Rearrangement of the power-base required several strategies. The first strategy was the distortion of people's cultural and religious identities. Imperialism sought to expunge peoples' identities. Peoples' affinity to the lands and histories had to be obliterated. If peoples were forced to give up their ethnic, national, linguistic and cultural identities, it was thought, they would be amenable to be subjugated by the imperial powers. Mass deportations were

executed through enslavement and forced migration. Exchanges of national and ethnic groups were employed to efface peoples' cultures and their affinity to their homelands and biological niches. Deported nationals and ethnic minorities were forced to adopt alien national cults and the veneration of the emperor.

Expunging people's identities meant creating global collectives. All peoples had to be united into a global society without any borders. Ethnic, religious and cultural differences had to be suppressed. Such a disposition had to be enforced to dominate regions far and near for gaining access to resources. Most emperors claimed sovereignty over every nation and people within their reach. Advancing global awareness through coercive means, it was thought, would prevent rebellion and revolt in the provinces. In pursuit of these global objectives, they destroyed every local culture and nation that stood in their way and integrated them into a large political entity. Imperial forces could not care less about people, their cultures and environment. Their global outlook had little to do with the health of the local environments and the people therein. They were merely interested in gaining access to the wealth and resources and extending their power over the vassals.

Nevertheless, this forced collectivization brought on unexpected windfall to the emerging axial movements. The rise of global awareness was an important contribution made by imperialism to the axial movement. Global awareness broke down many cultural barriers and the power of archaic myths. Lewis Mumford writes,

> Through the axial religions, a new kind of society was formed which overpassed all existing boundaries: a society of believers, united by a supernatural faith and a vision of perfection. The axial religions broke down the ancient isolation of tribe and village, city, state and even of empire: they marched across frontiers and summoned all men to a new life. The dividing lines between the in-group and the out-group,

> between Jew and Gentile, between Greek and barbarian, between neighbor and foreigner, were effaced. All men could become part of this new society, no matter what their social rank, their economic status, their political obligations, their color or their sex: they were children of one god, brothers and sisters in a single family.[21]

Second, primitive imperialism advanced the view that the world out there was in chaos. Drought, diseases, wars and social destitution gave evidence of a world in crisis and collapsing on all fronts. Both nature and society were disintegrating and in disarray. Invariably, the farmers, the herders and the artisans were blamed for the failures of the agrarian economy. They also suffered the brunt of the environmental failings. Imperialists denounced people close to the soil as ignorant, uncouth and unruly and as failing to maximize the use of the land and its resources.

This chaotic situation called for the establishment of order both in the society and in nature. Imperialism alone can establish the order. Order can be established only if people are subjugated and dispossessed of their power base -- the land and their histories. People must therefore be alienated from their land and environment. The vanquished and the vassals must be suppressed and their lands exploited. Societies close to the soil must be uprooted and supplanted elsewhere. Imperialists alone can establish order amidst chaos by subjugating all independent minded provinces, ethnic peoples and lands. It was thought that the displacement of societies would ensure order throughout the empire.

Order must also be established through human domination of nature. Humans must now stand apart from nature and confront her. Better still, humans should be at war with her. Primitive imperialism thrived on alienating and divorcing people from the environment. The brand of imperial ideology that developed in the Fertile Crescent sought to deal with nature as an enemy waiting to be defeated. Most Mesopotamian cults

reflect this rejection of the world. Such a rejection must advocate some form of dualism – a dichotomy between good and evil and the divine and the world. Babylonian cults portray the origin of the universe as a fierce struggle between divine powers -- *Marduk,* the god of order and *Tiamat,* the goddess of chaos. *Marduk* split the body of *Tiamat* down the middle, thus making a separation between the upper and lower parts of her body. The celestial realm is purer while the terrestrial realm – the world down below -- is imbued with evil. Nature can no longer have continuity with the creator. The Creator must stand apart from the creation. Nature is no longer the area of divine activity, and humans are called to join with gods in the war against it. All deities of nature must be subjugated. Much of these Babylonian confrontational thoughts were carried into the Assyrian cults also. Donald Hughes writes,

> The attitude of the peoples of Mesopotamia toward nature from early Sumerian writings down through the Akkadian and Assyrian literatures, is marked by a strong feeling of battle. Nature herself was represented in Mesopotamian mythology as monstrous chaos, and it was only by the constant labor of people and their patron gods that chaos could be overcome and order established.[22]

Confrontation between the divine and the world was also advocated by the Persian Prophet, Zoroaster (ca. 630-550 B.C.E.). Although Persian cults of the archaic times exuded reverence for nature and sought to maintain purity associated with it, Zoroastrian dualism introduced certain ambivalence toward nature. The creatures of the earth are divided into two classes, good and evil. Ahura Mazda is the god of light and goodness. Ahriman is the evil one and the prince of darkness. On the side of Ahura Mazda are all the good creatures, such as dogs, cattle and trees. The sun is a symbol of purity and its rays purify the elements in nature. On the other side are the noxious creatures like wolves, snakes, demons of disease, and flies. These creatures must be eliminated at all

costs. Jewish captives were exposed to Zoroastrianism during their Babylonian captivity, (597-538 B.C.E.). This exposure surely influenced the growth in Judaism the belief in a dualistic cosmos being torn between the forces of good and evil.

Another windfall of imperialism to axial thought was the rise of monotheism. Decimation of people's culture and alien surroundings created disorientation among displaced peoples. Alienation of people from lands and nature deities created a religious vacuum. Enforcing uniform civic behavior became problematic. National and ethnic cults did not have the wherewithal to claim the adherence of aliens in a foreign land. Ethnic cults were in large measure tied to their bioregions and agrarian and pastoral ethos. But these were of no avail in the imperial contexts. Imperial powers rushed to fill the vacuum with their own brand of cults – the personality cults. Every power -- from Pharaoh to Caesar – instituted himself as a quasi-divine object of reverence. By doing so, emperors forced peoples of different languages, religions, races and cultures to opt for a universal religion. The Book of Daniel records the atrocities of the personality cults perpetrated by Nebuchadnezar and his son, Belshazzar. But the imperial cults did little to change the inner disposition of the people. The folly of these cults galvanized displaced peoples' commitment to their own national cults. But now, there was a difference. The ethnic religious fervor turned more toward a future that transcended national and ethnic teleology. The scope of imperialism came to foster norms for a universal theism with attending ethics for personal and social life. National and ethnic deities were now cast as gods of the universe and all peoples. Like the sovereign, the supreme deities came to assume absolute power. All powers flowed from the supreme deity. Yahweh, a deity of the herding Hebrew tribe, was now cast into a supreme creator of the universe. Yahweh

was now seated on a throne surrounded by hosts of heaven. The Prophet Isaiah's vision of Yahweh reflects the imperial designs of the Babylonians and the Assyrians (Isa., chap. 6). Axial prophets envisioned a society ground on a universal ethical monotheism. Axial cults ultimately filled the void left by nature and national deities. The scope of the universal monotheism invested axial movements with a global mission. Axial prophets and philosophers were sold on imperial and urban ideologies and ways of life. They took advantage of the imperial contexts to spread their message and mission.

And finally, imperialism unwittingly forged the rise of individualism as an essential component of the axial movement. In enforcing collectivism, imperialism destroyed traditional ethnic and social group identities and affinities. Now the individual was free to shape his or her identity and destiny. The individual must now take responsibility for his actions, faith and existence. Neither the traditions nor the ethnic histories and values can be a sure guide for anyone's ethical existence. The axial movement was spearheaded by individuals who refused to conform to the established traditions and group identities. John Cobb saw this coming in the emergence of the axial mentality. He saw that the development of the human psyche was concomitant with the evolution of human societies and cultures. Human cultures and societies evolved in response to the modes of successive human societies' dealings with their environment. At every threshold crossing, there occurred a shift of "the seat of existence"– a fundamental awareness, which came to superintend the way humans would view and deal with the world and the society. Cobb saw the shift in the "seat of existence" deciding "the structure of human existence." The structure of existence evolves when the human psyche crosses each threshold by shifting its "seat of existence."[23] At every stage of human evolution, from

primal to archaic, archaic to civilized and civilized to axial, the human psyche went through a shift of its "seat of existence," thereby crossing the threshold to higher and higher "structures of human existence." At every stage of development, the human psyche shed its affinities to its previous existences and the way it filtered the surrounding world. Speaking about the shift in the "seat of existence" contributing to the transformation of "the structure of existence," from the archaic to the civilized to the axial ground, John Cobb writes,

> This shift in its turn further strengthened the rational consciousness, and finally man was able, from this new seat of existence, to assert *conscious control* over the whole of consciousness. The effective success of this effort, transforming the *whole of existence*, is to be found in the first millennium before Christ and is the defining mark of axial man [emphasis mine].[24]

Axial humans, according to Cobb, were those who, for the first time in the long evolutionary history of *homo sapiens*, were able to master, control and direct the *whole of existence.* Conscious control of the whole of existence includes both social and individual existence and destinies and the destiny of nature as well. Humans, both collectively and individually, were now capable of controlling and directing their own destinies as well as that of the others. Axial humans were masters of their own destinies. They unfettered themselves from being mythically subjected to the environment, their communities and history. During the axial epoch, individual human beings came to view themselves as those who could direct their own destiny largely unfettered by bonds with nature and society. Axial persons for the first time could negate consciously the power of nature on human destiny, not only metaphysically, but materially as well. The axial person also negated consciously the power of society and group over his or her own destiny. Cobb writes,

> This newness can be seen in the individuality and freedom of axial man. . . . Primitive man understood himself as constituted by his participation in a larger whole, rather than conceiving of the whole as composed of individual men who are the final agents of action, decision, and real individuality . . . . [T]he emergence of axial man was not only the emergence of a new understanding of man as individual, but of a new individuality. . . . In axial man this possible conscious control was extended in principle to the whole gamut of human action and thought. One no longer need do and think just what had been done and thought, and the mythical meanings by which man had lived so long were now problematic rather than simply given.[25]

Axial prophets provided the ideal role model for this conscious control of one's own life and destiny. Axial individuals should now seek their own salvation not in the destiny of nature, nor in ethnic and national histories, nor in the society, but individually apart from all that fettered them, including their own corporeal existence. The passion for achieving such a freedom consumed axial humans and alienated them from the world of nature as well as from collective existence within human societies. Ultimately, human societies are bound to their biological niches and social histories. Liberation and soteriology must now encompass the interests of the individuals and not the collective welfare and salvation of the society or that of the environment. For ultimately, any society that is naively grounded to the environment will go down when nature fails. The only hope of survival in this bleak prospect is to seek liberation from the past, the community, its teleology and the world of nature. Herein lay the ultimate irony of the axial negativity toward nature and its soteriology.

Summary

From our perspective, the most important contribution imperialism made to the axial age was the alienation of humans from nature and the concomitant rise of human

negativity toward nature. Human negativity toward nature grew in a context that alienated people from nature and society. Ancient urbanism and imperialism engendered alienated groups. The collapse of the ancient city-states, their economies and the failure of the environment also engendered alienation. Every alienated group advanced its own brand of negativity toward nature and sought liberation from a world that was seen to be failing. Alienated people – whether they were imperialists or urbanites or captives or vassals – advance their own views on nature, society, and life in and beyond this world. These nuances and variations make up the essence of axial negativity toward nature. Among them, three groups stand out as those who came to dominate the shaping of the axial disposition toward nature. Their mentality reflects their group identity and their station in life.

The first group consisted of imperial powers – the emperors, their coteries, bureaucrats, urban gentry, owners of large estates and industries and armies. They lived mainly in the central cities of their native lands and in the provincial capitals. They lived in luxury and comfort. Numerous slaves and servants attended to their personal comforts and service. Even some philosophers and prophets were found among this group. Their views on nature were shaped by their experience of the artificial urban environments consisting of public parks and private gardens. For the most part, these people were far removed from their native rural and agrarian environments. They were shielded from the raw nature. If ever any one talked about the environment or the countryside, he or she did so as one who viewed the world from the comfort and security of his urban settings. For these imperialists and urbanites, nature appeared merely as a resource base for personal economic gains. Nature was viewed as a sphere waiting to be dominated and

controlled for advancing one's own wealth, privileges and power. The health of the environment or the people who lived on the land was not uppermost in their minds. Some of the important axial tenets that under-gird western views on nature were engendered by this alienated people. Many of these views were based on metaphysics rather than on mythology. Urbanites by their very disposition tend to be secular. The attitudes toward nature reflected in their writings show a disposition that is ambiguous, contemptuous and conceited.

The second group consisted of the natives of the vassal states and colonies. They were forced to sub-serve their imperial and colonial overlords. These natives were like strangers in their own homeland. They were coerced to raise food crops not so much for their own subsistence, but for the consumption of their colonial masters and armies stationed on their own soil. Natives were taxed to fill the war-chests of the imperial powers and their masonry. They were also forced to provide all sorts of services to their imperial overlords with little or no compensation. The injustice of it all enraged and frustrated the natives. It was revolting and disgusting. The frustration could boil over and a bloody revolution can erupt anytime. The land gestalts, for these natives, are filled with disparagement and frustration. The environment appears disenchanted. On the other hand, the natives eagerly wait the day when their land would be set free from foreign domination. Until that day appears, they hold on to an ambiguous promise of a land free from foreign domination and oppression.

The third group consisted of expatriates – the captives and slaves in the foreign lands. They had been carried off to foreign lands to work as laborers on farms and public projects. Resignation, bitterness and sadness characterize their attitude to life. They hold

no love for the farms they labor in. Life has no meaning. Their forced deportation creates an acute sense of alienation from the world. They are alienated both from their own homeland and from the environment of the foreign land on which they have been supplanted. They come to suffer immense psychological trauma and disorientation.[26] The memory of their history and their homeland consumes their souls. Their national and ethnic histories fail to make sense in a foreign land. Their cultures and traditions, in which they took pride while in their homeland, appear absurd in the foreign lands. The faith nurtured in their homeland fails to give meaning in alien surroundings. Their gods, who gave them their homeland and precepts to live by, have failed them. On the other hand, they harbor nostalgic memories about their homeland and long for the day when they would be set free to return home. Much of the Old Testament was redacted in the context of this double jeopardy – a jeopardy that accepted the captives' resignation to the predicament of a life in a foreign land and the jeopardy that merely dreamed of a return to the homeland someday.

It is obvious that the axial negativity toward nature was engendered by alienated societies of the first millennium B.C.E. Primitive imperialists, ancient urbanites, the Diaspora and their prophets and philosophers engendered much of this negativity. They were for the most part alienated from the environment and from the larger populace of their own native lands. It would help to test this thesis with the aid of a few case studies – a study of societies shaped by imperialism, urbanism and hopes for a land free from all domination. Initially these societies started off with pro-nature stances. As they confronted growing environmental and social degradations and were swept by the imperial advances, their thoughts on nature turned negative. Each of these societies –

Egypt, Greece and Israel – is distinctive, and the changes in their attitude toward nature reflect the changes they confronted in their environment, history and society. An ecological reading of their histories would make this obvious.

Notes
Chapter 7
Imperial Existence and the Axial Negativity toward Nature

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19 Ibid., 70-71.

20 Ibid., 69.

21 Mumford, The Transformations of Man, 65-66.

22 Hughes, 31-32.

23 Cobb, The Structure of Christian Existence, 58-59.

24 Ibid., 58-59.

25 Ibid., 56-58.

26 Shepard, Nature and Madness, 69-70.

CHAPTER 8

The Axial Revolution in the Context of Imperial Cultures: Three Case Studies -- Egypt, Greece and Israel

The preceding chapters have shown the nexus between the religious attitude toward the natural world and the actual experiences of the world. When the environment readily yielded sufficient food, attitudes were positive. When, due to changes in climate and the results of human abuse food was difficult to obtain, attitudes became negative. Alienation was heightened when imperial rulers uprooted peoples from their homelands.

The example studied has been Mesopotamia, the most ancient civilization and the locus of the most destructive empires down to the middle of the first millennium B.C.E. It was around that time that the religious, philosophical and cultural developments occurred that we named the axial revolution in earlier chapters. We noted that in marked contrast with the primal spirit, axial revolution was characterized by alienation from nature. This alienation is understandably against the background of social and ecological devastation brought about by the great empires. For thoughtful people, life was recognized to be profoundly unsatisfactory. The question arose as to how the individual should live in such a context.

We have no records of this kind of reflection in Mesopotamia itself. Perhaps the militarization of life there worked against it. We do not know. But around the edges of the Mesopotamian empires, in Persia, Israel, and Greece, individual thinkers arose who proposed answers to new questions. For our purposes, the most important centers of the axial revolution were Greece and Israel; so in this chapter we will consider the societies especially in terms of their experience of nature.

There is a third civilization, almost as ancient as that of Mesopotamia, but with a very different history. That is Egypt. It is, in many ways, a counter example. Egyptians did not become alienated from nature and society, and, therefore, Egyptian culture did not

provide the context for axial thinking. Nevertheless, ancient Egyptians did think about the world and the human life in it in many interesting ways. Some aspects of their thinking did influence the axial movements that developed in the Fertile Crescent and the Levant. We will consider this counter example first and then turn to Greece and Israel.

Egypt

Egypt was somewhat of an exception to the general trend – the rise and fall of urban civilization followed by imperialism and the collapse of the agrarian economies that had sustained the nation-city-states that gripped the regions of the Levant and the Mediterranean world. Unlike the other civilizations of the Mesopotamian region, Egyptian society and culture were not annihilated or even unduly affected. It is intriguing that Egypt, although in close proximity to the other cultural centers and in many ways similar to the other river valley civilizations of the ancient world, somehow survived intact, as did its religious cults, until the Christian era.

Unfortunately, the land of Egypt -- its culture, history and people -- has been presented to the outside world very often through the history of the Hebrews. The stories of the Hebrews as presented in the popular culture, especially in movies like the Ten Commandments and the Prince of Egypt, have distorted the facts and realities. The Exodus narrative depicts Egyptian Pharaohs as ruthless despots and oppressors of ethnic minorities. Although there is evidence for the oppression of ethnic and marginal minorities in Egypt (as elsewhere in the ancient world), ancient Egypt was, overall, a remarkably hospitable and open society. Environmental refugees sought out Egypt during lean periods. In addition, from time to time, ethnic tribes, both from the upper highlands of North Africa and nomads from the West African plains and the Arabian Peninsula, migrated into Egypt and made it their home.

From all accounts, it is clear that ancient Egypt was not a land of inhuman barbarians. Unlike the Assyrians, Babylonians and others of the Mesopotamian region, Egyptians did not have the disposition or the urge to be cruel and violent. There was no need for Egypt

to cross its border to pillage and plunder its neighbors for resources, since Egypt produced more than sufficient grain to feed its people. Although Egypt was involved in military conquests and attempted to extend its borders from time to time into and beyond Israel, its military campaigns outside its borders were motivated more by the desire to secure trade routes that passed through Palestine than by concern for imperial hegemony.[1] Unlike the Assyrians and Babylonians, the Egyptians did not commit massive resources to military buildup, weapons and standing armies. Besides, the people of Egypt were never subjected to being carried away as captives into a foreign land and sold as slaves, and their land was never laid desolate and left in ruins. There were, of course, periods of internal disturbances and revolts caused by famines when the flooding of the Nile was below normal.

Egypt was an island unto itself. The seas and the deserts secured its borders. It was quite content to live the way it was, with all food requirements obtained locally. Except for the cedars from Lebanon, which Egypt imported in large quantities for building palaces, boats and temples,[2] Egypt did not lack anything that it needed to acquire from elsewhere. In fact, Egypt usually produced more grain than it could consume. People from other drought-prone arid regions of the Fertile Crescent and Mediterranean lands constantly sought refuge in Egypt, making Egypt one of the most densely populated nations of the ancient world.[3]

The secret of Egypt's continued survival and prosperity was rightly described by the Greek historian Herodotus as "the gift of the Nile." The annual flooding of the Nile brought down moisture and rich alluvial soil to the fields of Egypt, thus allowing the spread of civilization all along the Nile River valley between Aswan and the Mediterranean Sea -- a distance of 750 miles.

Nevertheless, not all was well with Egyptian society and the environment. The archaic agrarian and pastoral societies had degraded the environment of Egypt even before the dawn of urban society.[4] The Nile valley had lost some important fauna and flora that had flourished in the delta region during the hunting and gathering stages of human

evolution.[5] Besides, Egypt's fortune swayed with the vicissitudes of the Nile River. The historic period in Egypt began around 3000 B.C.E. when dynastic rules were established with the Pharaoh Menes (Narmer) Djer leading up to the age of Pyramids. During 2250-1950 B.C.E., there was a considerable drop in the flood level, which resulted in reduced crop yields, leading to mass starvation and death of livestock and the abandonment of marginal lands. For much of the period, there was strife between competing dynasties, especially between the temple towns of Heracleopolis in Middle Egypt and Thebes in Upper Egypt. It is interesting to note that just about this time, when Egypt was under political turmoil, the urban civilization of Sumer was beginning to disintegrate due to widespread desiccation and the frequent dust-storms that visited this region. The victory of Thebes united Egypt under Menthopte II, the fifth ruler of the 11th Dynasty (2133-1992 B.C.E.). During 1840-1770 B.C.E., there were high floods; although destructive, they ensured adequate water and silt for crop cultivation. It was during the lean period -- during the Theban Dynasty (1786-1570 B.C.E.) -- that we read about Jacob and his family's descent into Egypt and Joseph's handling of the famine in Egypt.[6] It was also a period when Hyksos – a pastoral people from Syria -- overran all parts of Egypt and installed Set, their warlike favored deity. One sees a similarity between the Hyksos invasion into Egypt and the Aryan advance into Indian sub-continent.

Of interest to us is the period of the New Kingdom, from 1570 to 1085 B.C.E., when Egypt attained super power stature in the region. Egypt established itself as a military power and its imperial borders expanded into Asia stretching beyond Euphrates. It was during the reign of Rameses II (1290-1224 B.C.E.) that the flight of Israelites from Egypt took place. Green Historians wonder whether the Exodus event (ca. 1280 B.C.E.) itself may have been caused by the drought-like conditions that visited Egypt during these centuries. Following this, there was a steady decline in the river flow and by 1150 B.C.E. there was a substantial decline in crop yields, due mainly to the low flood levels. This again caused major political and social problems. From the close of second millennium B.C.E., Egypt slipped into oblivion from the world stage and was overrun by successive

empires of Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome.

In spite of the declining fortunes of the River Nile, Egyptian society did not suffer total annihilation, as was the case with most other ancient urban civilizations. Although there were fluctuations in the annual flood, the river system as such was relatively dependable and predictable. Besides, the agricultural methods that Egyptians practiced for centuries continued with little change, and Egypt was able to produce surplus crops. The stability of the agricultural system was largely due to judicious use of the natural processes of the Nile -- channeling the natural river flow to provide the right amount of water at the right time, together with the silt to fertilize the land. Unlike the Sumerians, the Egyptians did not create artificial farming environments by constructing a network of canals. The Nile delta region did not suffer the problem of salinization and water logging encountered in Sumer, and therefore wheat cultivation was never given up.[7] Thus, Egypt turned out to be the granary of the ancient Mediterranean world, especially during the imperial period when the whole Fertile Crescent and Levant regions were gripped by food shortages.[8] Even as late as the eighteenth century AD, crop yields in the Nile valley were about twice as high as those in France.

The Egyptian' disposition toward nature was remarkably warm and friendly. Unlike the confrontational disposition of her neighbors – the Assyrians and Babylonians -- Egyptians felt at home in the world and celebrated the bounties and the multifarious manifestations of nature. The tenor of the scores of murals and the myths surrounding them show that ancient Egypt was a hospitable place not only for humans, but also for animals and plants. Unlike the many murals of the Mesopotamian and Eastern Mediterranean lands, which invariably depict war scenes involving brutal annihilation of the vanquished and torture of animals, we come across a mere handful of reliefs depicting warfare and weapons of war. Egyptian rulers are frequently seen holding a scepter in the form of shepherd's crook in their left hand and a whip of flax (to smack flies) in their right hand. Scenes of chieftains holding spears, swords and shields and swordsmen running before chieftains' chariots are few and far between. Murals of hunting and

torture of animals are comparatively few in comparison to the plentiful reliefs that celebrate the bounties of nature and a prosperous and peaceful society. Although we come across a few scenes depicting conflicts, these deal mainly with the campaigns waged to unify the land and the empire under a central rule. On the other hand, we find many reliefs that show thrones, of both queens and kings, and sanctums surrounded, in and out, by animals and plants of all types and by singing minstrels with harps and lutes. Falcons, cats and crocodiles find sanctuary in the temples. Bulls and rams are adorned, fed and mummified. The Israelites' depiction of Yahweh as a shepherd-king more closely resembled the images of Egyptian monarchs than those of the Mesopotamian bloodthirsty warlords.[9] Palace and temple wealth was expended more for public projects, pyramids and funerary practices than for standing armies and wars.

The great pyramids and the funerary artifacts of Egypt extol the Egyptian brand of afterlife, a philosophy that affirms the essential goodness of life in this world. The recent findings of over 10, 000 mummies, some of them with gold coverings, speak volumes about Egyptian wealth and their outlook on life. Egyptians believed that life after death is essentially a continuation of the good life experienced in this world, and their funerary practices sought to ensure that this good life would continue unendingly.

Egyptian cosmology reflects the dependable cycles of the natural environment. Egyptian deities were venerated in the form of specific animals and plants. Egyptians fondly incorporated a great variety of plants and animals in their cultic life. Incorporation of flora and fauna in Egyptian cultic life should not be understood as residues of primal animism or Totemism nor should it be equated with the idolatry of the archaic world.[10] Egyptians did not worship animals *per se*; rather they venerated these species for the divine qualities they associated with them.[11] In venerating specific animals and plants, ancient Egyptians might have been led to protect nature from undue human exploitation. In the paintings, sculpture, and objects of daily life, an artistic joy in nature can be sensed.[12] God was present in the world through animal and plant species. To the Egyptians, all nature was animate and filled with the divine spirit. The following

Egyptian poem exults in the realities of nature.

All beasts are content with their pasturage;
Trees and plants are flourishing.
The birds, which fly from their nests,
Their wings are stretched out in praise to thy spirit.[13]

This poem comes from the time of Ikhnaton, who reigned from ca.1379 to 1362 B.C.E. Ikhnaton pursed a primitive form of monotheism. The Pharaoh changed his name from Amenhotep IV to Ikhnaton in honor of the sun-god, Aton. Ikhnaton's queen was Nefertiti, one of the famous women in Egyptian history. On his death, he was succeeded by the boy-king, Tutankhamen. The discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb in 1922 was indeed an archaeological sensation.

Ancient Egyptians were perhaps the earliest ones in human history to stumble upon the idea of monotheism and Ikhnaton is credited with advancing it initially. Monotheistic tendencies were prevalent even before Ikhnaton came on the scene. But what Ikhnaton did was to use the force and appeal of monotheism to his political advantage. Through enforcing monotheism throughout his empire, he sought to suppress the growing independence of the temple towns and stamp out any revolts. Egyptian nature deities represented one or the other of the divine qualities. Each temple town had its own patron deity. This polytheism led to frequent inter-city rivalries and conflicts. Ikhnaton sought to stem the conflicts and establish his supremacy throughout his empire by advancing monotheism. But monotheism, by virtue of its structure and function has to transcend all materiality and cruise in non-materialistic abstractions and language. Ancient Egyptians had yet to attained the sophistication needed for abstract metaphysics. Their idea of the divine was hopelessly grounded to the elements in nature. Ikhnaton sought to find a world-grounding in a reality that would encompass all divine qualities represented in every sacred animal of the Egyptian cults. In advancing monotheism, Ikhnaton attempted to bring unity and oneness throughout his empire. Ikhnaton identified this universal god in Aton – the sun-god. Aton was depicted in the form of the sun at its zenith, as a red disk, open and strong with rays stretching down to earth. The sun-god Aton came to

represent the divine creativity and goodness. Ikhnaton held that Aton alone was God, and that he was Aton's son. The name Ikhnaton means, "It is well with Aton." Every living creature had its being through the creative, sustaining and purifying light rays of the sun. Atonism represented the universality of its monotheism in the ever ever-present reality of the sun without any special reference to the Egyptian soil.[14] For Ikhnaton, the solar monotheism was absolute. In enforcing solar monotheism, he displaced all traditional deities and forced his people to abandon polytheism. The following hymn in honor of Aton depicts the motifs of Ikhnaton's monotheism.

> O sole God, beside whom there is no other.
> Thou dist create the earth according to thy heart . . . .
> For thou has made them for thyself,
> Thou lord of them all, who weariest thyself for them. . . .
> Thou dist make the distant sky in order to rise therein,
> In order to behold all that thou has made. . . .
> The word subsists in thy hand,
> For thou art length of life of thyself,
> Men live through thee. . . .
> Thou risest beautifully, O living Aton,
> Lord of eternity;
> Thy glowing hue brings life to the hearts of men,
> When thou hast filled the Two Lands with thy love.
> O God, who himself fashioned himself,
> Maker of every land. . . .
> Thou makest the hearts of men to live by thy beauty. . . .
> All flowers live and what grows in the soil
> Is made to grow because thou dawnest.
> They are drunken before thee.
> All cattle skip upon their feet; the birds in the marsh fly with joy,
> Their wings that were folded are spread,
> Uplifted in adoration to the living Aton.[15]

Ikhnaton's Monotheism was indeed quite innovative in comparison to the earlier forms of Egyptian theism that reflected a blend of monotheism and polytheism. Before Aton was thrust into the center stage, Amon-Ra (Amon) – the god of the wind -- was widely revered. The imperial advance of the New Kingdom over a vast empire stretching from the Euphrates to the Sudan necessitated propelling Amon as the "king of gods" and the universal "Lord of the Thrones of the Word."[16] The popularity of Amon did not

depend on imperial fiats. Amon's enchanting nature made Amon popular throughout the land without any imperial patronage. Amon's personality was associated with the gods of creation and fertility. What was interesting in the choice of Amon was the elusive nature of the deity. Amon was represented in the ethereal nature of the wind. The name Amon means "stealth" or "elusive."[17] And yet Amon was available to people in many different forms. Amon could take on any number of names suitable for its contexts, and can be presented in many different realities. In essence, Amon was presented as "the one in many and the many in one." Despite the elusive nature, Amon was popular, universal and personal. Amon sought justice for the poor. Amon was loving and compassionate. With the adoption of Aton as the supreme deity, Ikhnaton dethroned Amon and defaced every monument on which the name of Amon appeared. Such a desecration of Amon did not go well with the masses.

Ikhnaton's adoption of monotheism took place in the context of growing unrest and the spread of imperialism. As we showed in the previous chapter, imperialism and monotheism go hand in hand. Emperors institute themselves as semi-divines or representatives of the divine on earth. Prophets and priests are relegated to playing a minor role in the cultic life of the empires. These religious functionaries merely endorse and affirm the absolute power of the emperor over all human affairs (including the spiritual and moral life of the people) and lands. Since the emperor is a true representative of the divine, he is infallible and is answerable to no one but to himself. Imperial cults have a very brief shelf life. Towards the closing years of his reign, Ikhnaton became very unpopular and the cult of Aton lost its apeal. With the death of Ikhnaton, Aton was displaced and Amon was reinstated as the all-pervasive deity immanent in all sacred animals and plants throughout Egypt.

Hebrew immigrants in Egypt before the Exodus event must have encountered the Egyptian form of monotheism. The Israelites in Egypt were sojourners and they had an ambivalent encounter with the nature. The Israel's tribal deity, rooted to the land of Palestine, did not square well with the historical experience of the Hebrew slaves in

Egypt. We find Hebrew monotheism gaining critical mass during the Israelites' sojourn in Egypt. The interesting thing was that the evolution of Hebrew monotheism was (at least among the Hebrews in Egypt) founded on historical experience rather than on to a material reality, like that of Egyptian monotheism. Thus, the Exodus event provided the necessary world-grounding for Hebrew monotheism. Whether the Exodus was a result of historical or environmental factors is a matter for further study. We tend to think that it was prompted by historical dynamics caused by the environmental crisis.

Ancient imperialism at the core center was rooted in the environmental failures. Egyptian imperialism itself was rooted to some extent in the environmental failures within its own borders as well as in the environmental crisis sweeping across the adjacent lands that brought a flood of environmental refugees into its borders. With the death of Rameses XI in 1085 B.C.E., the New Kingdom collapsed. Egypt broke apart again into Upper and Lower kingdoms. Egypt was no longer a player on the world stage. Its efforts to return to world stage were thwarted by successive empires from the Assyrian down to the Roman. The providence of the Nile River sustained Egypt through the good and bad times. The resilience of its environment kept the society from disintegrating and restrained it from the dialectics of the history that would have drawn Egypt into axial revolution. Thus we find that Egypt did not contribute anything significant to the rise of the axial mentality. Had Ikhnaton's innovations succeeded, Egypt might have been a significant player in the rise of axial revolution.

Greece

Like Egypt, ancient Greece experienced geomorphologic and ecological changes wrought by the spread of agricultural systems that were also concomitant with social and political change. The Early Bronze Age of the Aegean region witnessed the emergence from the Neolithic societies of the Minoan and later Mycenaean societies during the second millennium B.C.E. Problems associated with primitive and expanding agricultural systems, such as poor harvests and droughts, contributed to the collapse of

Mycenaean culture and consequently created political instability. Greece went through what is known as the "Greek Dark Age," lasting about four centuries, until the emergence of the city-states that characterize its classical age.[18]

The Greeks developed their civilization to the height of its brilliance and then saw decline set in. Written evidences bear witness to the impact of classical civilization on the landscape. Numerous classical authors refer to the cutting and burning of forests as populations expanded. Greece is not endowed with large plains where cultivation could be expanded. Its hilly-mountain terrain is unsuitable for cultivation. Therefore, Greece's economy depended heavily on quarrying, metal goods, wine, cereals, pulses and olives that could be traded in exchange for raw materials and other food items like vegetables and grain. Quarrying and mining were major economic activities. Greeks mined and quarried marble, limestone, conglomerate, and, less often, granite for the construction of temples and other public buildings. They mined for gold, silver, and electrum. These mines were exhausted before the Hellenistic period. The mining and quarrying left deep scars on the hillsides. Work in the mines was the hardest and cruelest, and was done chiefly by slaves and condemned criminals.[19] Greek societies excelled in sea trade and commerce. The profitable commercial enterprise of Greece contributed to the rise of an affluent society, especially the city-states that could support intellectual and artistic pursuits.[20]

The attitudes of the early Greeks toward nature, before the classical period, were expressed by their religion. Ancient Greek religion in large part was the worship of nature. Gods were essentially nature deities and nature was considered as the sphere of the their abode and activities. Most ancient altars and places of worship were constructed outdoors surrounded by sacred groves. Hunting in sacred groves was forbidden. The gods ruled nature and they appeared and acted through it. They loved the mountains, especially Mount Olympus, the highest peak in Greece. The gods and goddesses made their homes in the wilderness, and visited human societies from time to time.[21]

Greeks were disposed to aesthetics, beauty and an affinity with their natural locality.

Gods represented esthetic values, form and beauty. Shrines and temples were located in natural settings. The ancient Greeks enjoyed and delighted in nature in its many aspects. Scores of taboos against pollution that prohibited wanton destruction of nature were observed meticulously. The beauty of the Greek landscape -- the deep blue sea, the rocky islands and the waving forests, all seen in the clear Greek light -- induced an appreciation of beauty and the cultivation of an aesthetic disposition. The Greeks' sense of aesthetics is reflected in their art and celebrated in their literature. Greek architecture and sculpture included motifs from nature. While Greek sculptors predominantly portray the beauty of the human body, they also give careful attention to the beauty and human enjoyment of the natural world.

The Greeks' observance of nature was not limited to esthetic values alone. The Greeks of the classical period tried to understand the environment rationally – in scientific and philosophical categories. Before the classical period, the environment was understood in mythical terms. During the classical period, the Greek attitude toward nature became more rational and less mythological. Of course, myth and religion persisted in Greece and were reflected in Greek philosophy. But the early philosophers seriously asked questions about the substances that made up the world and its processes.[22] Greek philosophers affirmed the ability of the human mind to discover the truth about nature through the use of reason. Instead of a nature filled with spiritual beings and seen as a stage for the play of the gods, the environment was to them an object of thought and rational analysis. Worship of nature was replaced with philosophical understanding.

Pre-axial Greek religion recognized humankind's oneness with nature. The Greeks believed that the gods upheld the order of nature and punished the transgressor. When everything holds its proper time and place, then justice and peace prevail on earth and in heaven. Justice and fairness for Greeks meant keeping proper relationships between humans, nature and the gods. This was the only sure means of continued productivity of the environment and the prosperity of human society.[23] In the Greek mindset, everything in nature has its defined role and purpose, and ultimately all realities in nature had human

ends. Protagoras said, "Man is the measure of all things." Protagoras said that everything in nature has its usefulness to humans and that this use was the reason for its existence.[24]

One significant contribution of the Greek thought to the human-world understanding was to view humans as distinct from nature and the tendency toward 'distancing of humans from nature.' This was particularly evident during the classical period. Greeks of the classical times were philosophically and aesthetically disposed. While the Greeks of the pre-classical time saw nature in mythical terms, the Greeks of the classical time sought to understand nature in rational, aesthetic and scientific terms. The growing tendency toward aesthetic valuation as opposed to mythological valuation led to an ever-increasing distancing of humans from nature. Stripped of its mythological powers, nature appeared more humane and an entity with which the Greeks of the classical and axial times could relate and feel comfortable. Both nature and the gods did not dwarf human beings;[25] rather, for the Greeks, both nature and gods appeared approachable and understandable. John Cobb writes,

> Homeric man emerged into axial existence by the psychic acts of the aesthetic distancing of the environment and the aesthetic projection of the gods. . . . Only where the world was aesthetically distanced could the gods be aesthetically projected, and only where the mythical power of the gods was broken by such a projection could man be really free to enjoy his aesthetically distanced environment. Thus the foundation of Greek culture was aesthetic, specifically the aestheticizing of mythical meanings. Within this context, the rational consciousness could pursue its inquiry into forms in geometry, science, and logic.[26]

Nevertheless, as time went by, the loci of the ideals of aesthetics were found not so much in nature or in the Greek gods, but in the human corporal forms and existence. Greek gods themselves were more represented in human form than anything else. Greek gods did not strike fear in hearts of humans, nor did they induce besotted awe-inspiring devotion on the part of humans toward a single deity. They were for the most part sensually and aesthetically disposed and humans could easily identify with them and their love of life. But this changed drastically during the classical period. Gods, temples, and

nature were gradually disenchanted to the extent that they no longer came to be the depositories of aesthetic values and moral ideals. Rather humans, more specifically the human body – the naked human body, both male and female – became the locus of aesthetic values.[27] Cobb writes,

> [T]he aesthetic quality of the human body, both male and female, played a role in Greek culture hardly paralleled elsewhere. Probably no other people have been able to celebrate the excellence of form of the naked body in such remarkable separation from sexual interests. . . . The reality of a man was presented as essentially public. It was what it showed itself as being to others.[28]

How did this radical transfer of grounding – grounding of moral and aesthetic ideals -- from the gods of nature to that of the human body and heroes come about? Why was not beauty seen in nature any longer? Pythagoras (ca. 580-500 B.C.E.), the Greek philosopher and mathematician who played a crucial role in formulating principles that influenced Plato and Aristotle (and whose beliefs and ideas were rediscovered during the Renaissance and contributed to the development of mathematics and Western rational philosophy), saw the natural, physical world loathed and condemned as the source of all evil and sin. He wrote that the world of nature is "a joyless place where murder and vengeance dwell, and swarms of other fates – wasting diseases, putrefactions, and fluxes – roam in darkness over the meadow of doom."[29]

Distancing of humans from nature and finding the loci of values in human corporal form and beauty did not last long. Among the basic tenets of the Pythagorean philosophy was the belief that nature, at its deepest level, is mathematical in nature. Since the human body itself is part of the earthly existence, humans must strive to liberate their soul from all physical bondage and rise to seek union with the divine. In other words, for Pythagoras, the world of nature is no longer the repository of any moral and religious values. Pythagoras taught that the human aim in life should be to live as purely as possible in order to transcend earthly existence. Since the human body is part and parcel of the physical world, humans must ultimately seek liberation from the natural environment. J. Baird Callicott says that Pythagoras's philosophy of soul and body is

"the very epitome of an alienated, otherworldly outlook."[30] Pythagoras's concept of human nature was essentially dualistic. He taught that human nature is constituted by a divine soul in an alien mortal body.

Pythagoras's dualism became the cornerstone of Plato's philosophy of human beings. In some respects, Plato's life and philosophy bear a resemblance to that of the Buddha. Disillusioned with the political situation in Athens, Plato devoted himself to a life of philosophy. He attempted passionately to construct an ideal state based on the moral foundations of unchanging non-natural and non-temporal ideals. Plato could not look to the physical world to locate those ideals, for they perished constantly. For Plato, these ideals must be found in the immutable "forms," not in the perceptible perishing objects around us. In the Platonic world, the human soul takes on a life of its own, seeking union with the divine by transcending the world. Not surprisingly, it was this philosophy of Plato that came to under-gird Gnosticism. In the Gnostic mind, the loci of positive values could not be identified through the aesthetic valuing of the world or in a human existence as the measure of all values. In Gnosticism, there was no continuity between the spirit and the material, mind and matter, the cosmos and the divine, and the human and the non-human world. In Gnostic development, we see the culmination of the disenchanted world. The Apostle Paul of the early church drew heavily from these Greek dualistic ideas. We find that these ideas became the foundational beliefs of the Western Christian world. Callicott writes,

> The worldview bequeathed to Western cognitive culture by Greek philosophy is therefore one in which nature is essentially profane, while man, because of his soul, is essentially divine and metaphysically distinct from nature. The profane, reductive, material, and mechanical picture of nature suggests that the environment can be radically rearranged and violently transformed without destroying its organic integrity – since it has none. And man's separateness from and superiority over nature suggest that he has a right to radically rearrange and to violently transform the natural environment and that he is disassociated from the harmful consequences of doing so, if any there be.[31]

Greek philosophy has exerted an enduring influence on Western concepts of nature.

Philosophers of the classical times (except for Aristotle) were not particularly interested in the natural world. They were only interested in finding the underlying order and elements of the natural world that made it possible to comprehend the world in rational and scientific terms free of any mythic sense. On the other hand, being keen observers, they saw the environmental degradation that was taking place all around them. Philosophers like Herodotus, Xenophon, Plato and Aristotle were aware of the environmental crisis and wrote about it in graphic terms. Plato in his *Critias* records the most graphic description of the effects of deforestation and soil erosion for us:

> What now remains compared with what then existed is like the skeleton of a sick man, all the fat and soft earth having wasted away, and only the bare framework of the land being left. . . . [T]there are some mountains which now have nothing but food for bees, but they had trees not very long ago . . . . [T]here were many lofty trees of cultivated species and . . . . boundless pasturage for flocks. Moreover, it was enriched by the yearly rains from Zeus, which were not lost to it, as now, by flowing from the bare land into the sea; but the soil it had was deep, and therein it received the water, storing it up in the retentive loamy soil, and . . . provided all the various districts with abundant supplies of springwaters and streams, whereof the shrines still remain even now, at the spots where the fountains formerly existed.[32]

Indeed, Greek philosophers observed and understood the growing environmental crisis of their times. But they did not offer any clear solutions. On the other hand, the worldviews they proffered were riddled with ambiguities and dualities. These worldviews did not point toward any eco-sensible ways of living in an environment that was disintegrating. Callicott concludes that "[f]rom a contemporary environmental point of view, Greek philosophy is a part of the problem – indeed, a very big part – not the solution."[33] We, on the other hand, conclude that the Greek philosophies were a part of the problem even in their times. These philosophies not only distanced humans from the world, but went a step further and disenchanted the world itself, especially during the last few centuries of the first millennium B.C.E.

A cursory reading of the Greek philosophy for its environmental sensibilities -- from Milesian philosophers to Gnostics -- becomes progressively depressing. The values of

nature were eroded steadily in successive philosophies. By the time we come to Plato, nature has been completely degraded, and as we move into the axial age, we encounter philosophies like Gnosticism that are at war with nature. Gnosticism is a product of Hellenistic rationalism and therefore an axial phenomenon. It developed and crystallized during the first three centuries C.E. It grew out of Plato's philosophy. Gnosticism is an extreme form of the dualism we encounter in the history of religions. Gnosticism brought a radical dichotomy between physical and spiritual realms. A dualistic philosophy like Gnosticism will certainly increase the alienation of humans from the non-human world. The sense of alienation from the world and the society was common to most axial traditions.[34] But what Gnosticism engendered was one of its acute (and perhaps the worst) forms. Gnostic thoughts hold that evil resides in the physical body and the material world. Even human corporeality was not spared. Since the human body is made up of materials that are prone to decay, the human body is also evil. No moral and social good can spring from corporeality. On the other hand, the conscious mind is free of all evil. When the conscious mind lapse into ignorance, evil takes over. The whole cosmos is hierarchical. And all levels of cosmos are demonized and evil. The divine world of spiritual goodness lies beyond the cosmos, in the "heaven beyond the heaven."[35]

How did the Gnostic mind come to develop such an acute scheme of dualism? As we showed here, during the few centuries before and after Christ, Greece and its adjoining regions suffered some of the worst forms of environmental and social catastrophes experienced anywhere in the world. In particular, Greece not only suffered environmental degradation caused by human callousness, but also suffered enormous social disruption due to the incessant wars between its cities.[36] Greece also waged wars beyond its borders and forced the countries in the Levant to absorb the costs of its domination and economic survival. We remember Greece for its great philosophers. Yet, we must not ignore the fact that much philosophizing in classical times took place against the backdrop of the violence and degradation of Greek society – the internal

conflicts between the city-states and the wars waged outside its borders during its imperial expansion. Life was quite unsettling for Greece at the advent of axial times of the first millennium B.C.E. Except for the aristocrats and the wealthy in the cities, the majority of the Greek citizens both in the rural and urban areas suffered economic and environmental misfortunes. Evil was experienced on all fronts – political, societal and ecological. People felt alienated from the world and society. It is in this context that Gnosticism finds its fertile ground. The realities of evil could not be brushed aside. The dilemma forced the Greeks to look for a scapegoat to account for the presence of much evil. Dualism was the answer for the evil in the world and it was identified in the materiality of the cosmos. The environment of Greece and the Hellenistic world was deteriorating and was causing immense suffering and pain. Therefore, nature must be at fault. Anything that had to do with the physical world was thought to be the source of evil. The world produced from evil matter and possessed by evil demons cannot be a creation of a good God. Therefore, this world is alien to God. The God of the Gnostics came to be presented only in abstraction, beyond any name or predicate. God is absolute and the source of good spirits who together form the *pleroma*, the realm of light, knowledge and goodness. The human spirit must discard the corporality and ignorance, and seek union with the realm of light and knowledge.

Gnosticism was a spiritual movement, but of a different sort. It did have a wide appeal during the first few centuries of Christian era. Nevertheless, it was a sinister force that led to the disintegration of both communities and the environment. In some sense, both Christianity and Gnosticism reflect a spiritual existence that characterizes the axial revolution. John Cobb saw this as a paradigm shift -- another human crossing of a threshold into axial existence. The essence of this shift, whether the dualism of Gnostics or the apocalypticism of Israel, revolved around world-denying worldviews. Nevertheless, unlike Christianity, Gnosticism did not take any responsibility for human existence and actions in the world. The Gnostic self transcended into a spiritual realm and left the natural world to decay. "It understood itself as a supernatural entity caught or

implanted in the natural psyche. In its own being it was simply good."[37] The transcended self did not take any responsibility for the non-spiritual entities or the evils inherent in human physical existence. The same disposition was transferred to God's relation to the created world. In the Gnostic mind, God transcended the world and God had no responsibility for the world or its evils. It was totally alien to God. God can only relate to humans who are invested with the spirit.[38] Opposed to this Gnostic irresponsibility, Christian apocalypticism, in spite of its world-rejecting worldviews, stopped short of, and was opposed to, the dissolution of moral order. Apocalypticism itself survives on the force of a moral environment. Therefore, the primitive Christians who subscribed to the apocalyptic worldviews were exhorted to live simple and chaste lives.

Gnostic movements sought to challenge and absorb primitive Christianity. But the church maintained its identity intact. In the end, Gnosticism lost while the Church lived on. Nevertheless, the confrontation forced the church to clarify its own vital tenets. The confrontation caused a barrage of apologetic literature by the Church Fathers like Irenaeus of Lyon and Clement of Alexandria. Cobb maintains that Gnosticism lost the battle for the axial hearts and minds because it failed to take responsibility for the evil in the world. Ultimately for this reason, Christianity won, in spite of its world-denying dispositions.

How did the environment come to be disenchanted in the minds of the great philosophers of Greece? We can only speculate as to the causes for this steady erosion of the values of nature. The Gnostic mind of the axial times was far removed from the world of Milesian philosophers. Milesian philosophers saw beauty in nature. For them, the world of nature was the depository of all goodness and values. Cobb calls this Homeric existence – an existence that made it possible to view the world through the lens of aesthetic valuing.[39] Not much is known about Homer, and historians place him between 850 to 750 B.C.E. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the fact that Homer's Illiad is a war poem. Illiad describes the legendary Trojan War. The Trojan War is set within the

period of Mycenaean Greek civilization that existed from 1450 to 1100 B.C.E. Before this period, from about 2000 to 1450 B.C.E., the Aegean region experienced a flourishing civilization. For some unknown reason, this prosperous civilization suddenly fell apart.[40] The collapse of the Aegean civilization led to the rise of Mycenaean civilization. Mycenaean civilization is characterized by the rise of organized warfare between the major cities on the Greek mainland (as reflected in the legend of the Trojan War) and eventually led to its downfall.[41] Mycenaean civilization was followed by the rise of the classical period when the leading philosophers of Greece lived and produced their grand philosophies.

Could this radical change observed in ancient Greece -- from the pro-nature stance of the pre-classical mythical religious existence to that of the negativity of the Greek philosophy -- suggest an overall decline of the Greek environment during classical times? Why was the antiquity of Greece mired in warfare? Was this a pointer to the general trend in the Levant of this period – a trend that shows the widespread failure of the environment and the concomitant social unrest that engulfed this region? Of course, this calls for further research and study. Space does not permit us to delve deeply into this. Suffice to state here that for the students of Green History this appears to be a test case of growing distancing of humans from nature due in large measure to the devaluation of nature for its failure to meet human aspirations on account of the environmental crisis.

Indeed, the Greek environment suffered a sever setback during the classical times. In spite of the earliest religious, philosophical and aesthetic appreciation for nature, the Greek environment began to be degraded by the demands of the burgeoning urban centers. One of the most striking effects on nature in Greece was the removal of the forests, which occurred primarily in Classical and Hellenistic periods between 600 and 200 B.C.E. The disappearance of forests was concomitant with urbanization, which became widespread from about 650 B.C.E. as the population rose and settlements expanded. Trees were cut down for fuel -- the wood burnt or reduced to charcoal. Wood and charcoal fuels were used for domestic purposes as well as for industrial uses –

pottery making and smelting of iron ores. As the Greek cities grew, they took up building merchant ships. The demand for lumber to build ships increased greatly. When the forests in Greece could not be exploited further, it became necessary to import wood from distant forested areas. Removal of forest cover also meant a decline in wildlife and the hunting economy. Hunting was a major occupation in Greece during the days of Homer. It provided meat and skins. Furs from animals like the beaver trapped in northern Greece were used for warm clothing. By the Classical period meat was rarely eaten except on festivals and special occasions. Larger predators like lions and leopards were annihilated.

Many Greek poleis were built not only in Greece, but also along the coasts of the Mediterranean and Black seas. These cities obviously altered the hinterland by their demands for food, fuel, and raw materials. Most citizens in the cities owned farms in the countryside. Athens, one of the largest Greek cities, had a citizen population of about 30,000 adult males. Slaves did the manual labor both in the city and in the countryside. Donald Hughes notes that in spite of the careful town planning, air pollution, dust and crowding in Greek cities were major problems. Countless cooking fires, charcoal fires to heat rooms, the smoke from metal foundries and pottery firing and dust made the life in the city anything but desirable for ordinary citizens and slaves.[42]

One major problem in Greece was herding on the hillsides -- grazing and browsing of domestic animals. Because of the hilly terrain, over three-fourth of the land in Greece was unfit for agriculture. Steep mountain ranges were used for pasture. Greek herdsmen were no nomads. They were limited by the boundaries of their city-states. They lived in the villages and grazed the animals over a restricted range, thus causing overgrazing. Sheep and goats were most destructive to the environment. When grazing grounds run out, sheep and cattle tend to eat leaves and twigs. Goats and logging were responsible for permanently destroying thousands of square miles of forests on Mediterranean hillsides. Once the hillsides were made bare of trees and grass cover, torrential rains washed away the unprotected soil. The silt, sand and gravel flowed down the rivers and were deposited

at their mouths along the shores. The swamplands created by the silt and sand extended for miles and served as breeding grounds for mosquitoes. Malaria is believed to have entered Greece in the fourth century B.C.E.[43]

Despite its limitation, agriculture was the main economic activity of ancient Greece. Barley, wheat, olives, figs, grapes, and various other fruits and vegetables were cultivated. Scarcity of water kept the farms small and intensive. Olives were cultivated on a large scale on the hillsides. The hills of Attica were stripped bare of natural vegetation to make room for olive cultivation. Large olive plantations were worked by slaves. The Greeks did practice soil conservation through terracing and manuring. But these were not sufficient to withstand the demands of the burgeoning urban population. By the time of the advent of Christianity, the hills and mountains, which were once thickly forested, began to look barren, with dilapidated temples and shrines adorning their tops.

The Greek cities' economies depended also on the mining and quarrying industries carried out on the surrounding hills and valleys. Agrarian and pastoral economies of the city-states could only meet the growing demands of the urban societies. The cities had to import food stocks and resources from colonies and neighboring countries. During the classical times, the monarchy and the temples in the poleis gave way to aristocracy and a limited democracy. The elite land-holding and wealthy classes wrested the civic power from the palace and the temples. These changes in the urban ethos made the citizens of the classical times more secular and humanistic. Greek mythologies and the temple cults lost their relevance for the daily life in the cities. Pre-classical religion lost its hold on the general populace. Instead, metaphysics and ethics based on reason came to guide personal and social life. Like modern urbanites, peoples of the ancient cities also leaned toward secular existence.[44] Deities and cults rooted to nature and set within agrarian and pastoral cultures had little relevance for life in the cities. Market and temple squares increasingly came to serve as forums for free exchange of ideas and debates rather than a place for prophetic pronouncements and priestly oracles. Little wonder, that the Greek

contribution to the axial thought was more in terms of its metaphysics than its cultic utterances. Philosophers thrive in urban contexts whereas prophets and priests do well in the national and historical settings. People who lived in the Greek cities of the classical times were alienated from their environment, especially from their countryside. As we showed, Greek philosophies were also somewhat negative toward nature. They reflected the widespread degradation of the Greek environment and society.

With the decline of the Greek environment came also the decline of the Greek poleis. It is then that we witness the rise of Greek imperialism. The economy that propelled the classical period could not accommodate the growing pressure of the population on the available land. Greek cities were, therefore, forced increasingly to rely on the colonies on the Mediterranean costs and beyond. From the eighth to the fifth centuries B.C.E., a number of Greek colonies were established. A colonial way of life became a new social paradigm in the ancient world.[45] Trade between Greek cities and colonies were mainly by ships. The desire to expand Greek colonialism served as an impetus to the advance of Greek imperialism. The burgeoning population and the failure of the local environment encouraged engagement in imperial pursuits. With Alexander the Great, the imperial expansions crossed over continents, and Hellenistic culture spread all over the Mediterranean and as far away as Afghanistan and India. Greek colonies were set up all over the Levant and the Fertile Crescent.

Greek imperialism degraded the natural environment throughout the Levant and the Fertile Crescent. Imperial wars were waged against homes, farms, and the resources of the enemies as well as their armies and people. Invading armies often set forests on fire and destroyed the local environment. As we showed in Chapter 7, imperial wars wasted skilled human resources and raw materials, reduced people to slavery, and destroyed whole cities and above all the natural environment.[46] Alexander's conquests were no different, as they devastated cities and agrarian economies of the Fertile Crescent. Greek imperialism was a direct consequence of the failing economies of the Greek city-states and their surrounding environment. Mindless exploitation of nature brought the final

decline of the Greek imperial and cultural hegemony. The lofty philosophies could not save Greece from its environmental and social woes. These philosophies were also generally negative toward the world of nature.

Israel: A Case for Axial Anxiety

Of special interest to us is the saga of Israel and its attitude toward the environment. Israelite religion has left its impact directly on the worldviews of Judaism, Christianity and Islam -- three of the axial religious traditions that sway major portions of humanity and the way they continue to decide human treatment of the environment to the present day. The brief survey of the environmental attitudes of ancient Israelites undertaken here has many limitations. For one thing, Biblical scholarship has yet to catch up with the advances made by Green History. Therefore, any conclusions we offer here are as possible hypotheses to be considered with a great deal of caution. Nevertheless, Biblical narratives are not devoid of their environmental contexts and contents. Although human involvement with the environment does not figure prominently in the plot, the histories of ancient societies are set within their biological niches. In these narratives, the environment merely provides the backdrop and the stage for the unfolding human drama. Nevertheless, Biblical narratives do contain numerous pointers to the state of the environment.

Israel is a very small country. Unlike its neighbors, whose biological niches were largely constituted by desert plains and perennial rivers flowing through them, the land of Palestine is a land of incredible variety -- made up of hills and mountains, river valleys, long coastal regions, desert plains and large inland fresh and salt water lakes. During Biblical times (as well as now), the land received an annual rainfall of about 500 mm. The land is blessed with seasons of winter, spring, summer and fall. Although deserts surround it, Palestine itself was relatively fertile and productive. For this reason, as well as its size and vulnerability, Israel was, for much of its history, at the mercy of the empires on the north and Egypt on the south. Being a buffer state, it came under constant

attack from the superpowers in the region. The deterioration of Israel's environment was therefore not the result solely of the attitudes and practices of the Israelites.

The Jewish history traditionally begins with the Patriarchal Period during the earlier part of the second millenium B.C.E. The only source for this period are the sagas of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Genesis. Nevertheless, scholars of the ancient Near East and the Green Historians together vouch for the patriarchal epoch and its modes of existence as depicted in the Old Testament. Abraham is traditionally looked upon as the founder of the Jewish people. He is presented as an emigrant from Mesopotamia when the Sumerian civilization was in decline. Abraham may have been a contemporary of the Amorite king Hammurabi (c.1728-1686).[47] The migration of Abraham and his family from Sumerian regions to Canaan as recorded in Genesis 12:1-6 is believed to have taken place during the eighteenth century B.C.E. when there was a prolonged famine in the land.[48] Sumer, as we noted earlier, was afflicted by the collapse of its economic base -- the failure of its agrarian and pastoral economies. According to Clive Ponting, this was a period when the crop yield had fallen below 65 per cent of the earlier normal output in upper and lower Mesopotamian regions.[49] Environmental changes move people to migrate elsewhere. Such migrations usually occur in stages over generations. That seemed to have been the case with Abraham's father and his family. The family originally moved out of Ur, one of the prime cities of Sumer, to an outlying region of Haran. There, the family settled down, and after the death of his father Abraham and his family migrated into Palestine.

Abraham and his family lived a semi-nomadic existence in Palestine, pasturing their herds in the pattern of transhumance. The call of God to Abraham – to emigrate from the deserts of Mesopotamia into Palestine with his barren wife -- is a metaphorical reflection of the sterility of the Sumerian desert regions. The story of Israel begins in this context of sterility and destitution. Abraham was forced to flee the drought-stricken regions and abandon the failing farming and pastoral economies of the Sumerian cities and the flood-prone riverbanks into a land "flowing with milk and honey." Abraham and his clan also

give up the agrarian cults and opt for an abstract transcendent cult that reflect their pastoral ways of life. The God of Abraham is presented, therefore, as one who offers New Hope and a promise of a future for people caught up in an otherwise hopeless environmental and social destitution. This promise is available only to those who choose to trust this transcendent deity as against the earth deities.

Of course, much of what is attributed to the patriarchal religion comes from the times of Israel's existence as a nation under the monarchy of later times. The Deuteronomic ideologies that advance the claims to a "promised land" and covenant between Yahweh and Yahweh's people have to be read in this context. The call from God to Abraham, the acceptance of it by Abraham, and the consequent establishment of relationship between Abraham and his God were constitutive of "the covenant." According to this agreement, God promised that God would bless Abraham and his descendants and that Abraham and his descendants would become a great nation in the land to which God had brought them. In return, Abraham and his descendants should have only one God -- Yahweh -- as their God and place their trust and faith in him. The promise of Yahweh to Abraham (Gen.12:1-3) involves the promise of a land and the establishment of a people. God is presented as one who initiates a contractual relationship with humans for social and environmental blessings.

The covenant has four components; (a) trusting relationship between God and humans, (b) social blessings on Abraham and his descendents – peace and prosperity in the human community, (c) God's blessings on the land, and (d) the land as God's gift to the people. The covenant ideology might have been refined and advanced much later, especially during Israel's years under monarchy. We will consider it at length when we deal with Israel's monarchy. Suffice to say here that this covenant became the corner-stone of the consciousness of the Israelites as a people, Israel's historical destiny and an essential component of their worldview. The Promised Land was an essential component of Israel's worldviews.

Because of this covenantal existence, the Patriarchs and their descendents are

represented as beginning their sojourn with a unique sense of monotheism that set them apart from their contemporaries of the ancient Near East. Ethical monotheism was a unique contribution of the ancient Near East. Where and when exactly it originated – whether in Egypt or in the patriarchal world -- is a matter of dispute. Although Yahweh bestowed the land upon the Patriarchs, Yahweh was not regarded as a nature deity. There was hardly any trace of the animism of the preceding cultures. In the animistic nature cults, the divine awareness emerges essentially from human experience of the world of nature. However, in the case of Abraham, it was the failure of the environment that necessitated his clan moving out from Sumer into the Promised Land, giving up on all the polytheistic nature cults of Ur. Nature fails frequently and it cannot be the sure foundation for ethics and faith. Therefore, God cannot be seen as one who is tied to the environment or a locality or to an entity in nature, as was the case in primal and archaic cultures. God was a masculine person who took a direct interest in the chosen people -- the Israelites. True enough, God was the creator of the earth and all that is in it, as well as the sky and stars. His creative power could be seen in the things that God had made, and God's actions of providence could be seen in the world of nature. But God was above and beyond creation, ruling it from on high. God might ride upon the storm, but he was not the storm. He had formed the earth, and caused the waters to flow, but he was not the earth or waters.

The patriarchs themselves were a pastoral people and yet they did not associate the divine with their livestock. There was no trace of any totemistic phase – an extended bond of kinship relationship with any particular animal or objects and forces in nature. Although Yahweh was male, he had no female companion. Yahweh was of course associated with several titles and it suggests some plurality or multiplicity in the personage. Nevertheless, Yahweh for the most part stood alone without consort or offspring. Yahweh was also not restricted to any one geographical location, although Yahweh was closely associated with the Promised Land. The patriarchal faith depended on human relations with the transcendent deity. There was always a defined distinction

between the deity and the devotee. There was no sense of the deity absorbing the devotee or any reference to physical kinship or ancestral continuity.

Studies in anthropology confirm that transcendent monotheistic tendencies are more common among pastoral than agrarian cultures. Pastoral deities are more often male and warlike, representing the celestial forces like the sun, the stars and the sky. There are hardly any idols or icons, and their simple rituals usually consist of animal sacrifices made on altars built with stones. Pastoral people develop rich oral traditions and abstract art styles, and the core of their religious tenets are preserved and transmitted through mythopoeic language, songs, poetry and drama. It could be that the patriarchs' pastoral modes of existence drove them in the direction of claiming a transcendent celestial personality for Yahweh. Old Testament poetry – the Book of Psalms and Song of Songs -- reflect the pastoral motifs. Nevertheless, the God of Abraham was remembered as different from most pastoral deities, in that Yahweh was above nature and not part of the nature. Because of this radical difference, the patriarchal clans came into frequent conflict with the Canaanite culture, which was predominantly agrarian. The transcendent deity was at loggerheads with the down to earth Canaanite agrarian fertility cults. Aversion towards nature cults and decisive confrontation between Hebrew theism and Canaanite agrarian cults was to take place centuries later; nevertheless, the seed of the antagonism toward nature may well have been sown during the Patriarchal times.

Being nomads, the ancient Hebrews were exposed to harsh and hostile forces of nature. The vagaries of nature were looked upon with dread. Unlike the agrarian societies rooted to their biological niches, pastoral people look upon the environment with some measure of ambivalence. Nature does inspire awe and wonder but, above all, some measure of fear and dread. When the Hebrew religion crystallized during the years of sojourn in the Sinai Desert, this tendency became more pronounced. Nature, instead of remaining a source of constant fear, turned out to be an object for subjugation, and humans, instead of fleeing nature, became the very source of the threat. We read in Genesis,

> Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands. Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything." (Gen. 9:1-3 NIV)

The story goes on to say that the last of the Patriarchs, Jacob, alternatively called Israel, migrated with his tribe into Egypt during a severe famine in Palestine. The Patriarchs, being nomads, suffered the brunt of many natural disasters. Jacob, when driven by famine out of Canaan, settled with his clan in Egypt. Egypt was blessed with surplus grain stock that could absorb environmental refugees like Jacob's clan. Egyptians were initially tolerant of the refugees. But the political and economic fortunes of Egypt swayed with the cycles in the flood level of the River Nile. The drought that is told of Joseph's time speaks volumes of the frequency of these cycles repeating from time to time. Besides, we read that Jacob's clan itself grew in numbers. The immigrants became a security threat to the Egyptians, not only politically, but also economically and environmentally. And the Israelites were eventually forced into slavery. The story of Joseph, which seems to be set during the Hyksos period (1720-1550 B.C.E.), occurs at a time when there was a significant low flooding in Egypt and frequent drought in Egypt. The plagues recounted in the story of the Exodus also can be verified at various periods of Egyptian history as natural phenomena. The Hyksos themselves were an environmental refugee people in Egypt. They had fled into Egypt from the drought-prone regions of Syria. The Hyksos were a pastoral people and fiercely warlike. On arrival, they found a land that was in a weakened state and the cities in strife among themselves. It was easy for the Hyksos to subdue the whole of Egypt and establish their Shepherd Kingdom. Many of the pastoral motifs found in the art and culture of the New Kingdom (1570-1085 B.C.E.) were borrowed from the Hyksos reign.

Slavery in the ancient world was frequently brought about by the failure of the environment and by the drought conditions. Environmental refugees in a foreign land

were often subjected to slavery and forced labor, and this may have happened with the Hebrews in Egypt. The reigning Pharaoh responded to economic decline by forcing the environmental refugees in Egypt to build massive public projects.[50] The Bible records that Moses organized and liberated the slaves – "a mixed company of strangers" (Numbers 11:4, NEB) -- from Egyptian oppression and led them through the deserts of Sinai Peninsula to the borders of Canaan. The Exodus event may have occurred around 1280 B.C.E. during the reign of Rameses II (c.1290-1224). This group of freed slaves eventually came to be known as Israelites. Israelites believed that it was Yahweh, their God, who delivered them from the oppressive slavery. Although Egyptian oppression may have triggered the Exodus event, a general decline in the crop yields and the population pressure brought about by the burgeoning Hebrew clans may have forced Egyptians to unshackle the Hebrew slaves and drive them out of Egypt.

When Moses became old, Joshua assumed leadership of this enlarged alliance of Hebrews and led them over Jordan into Palestine. Scholars place the period of the Judges from about 1200 to 1050 B.C.E. It was a Dark Age of drought and desiccation that resulted in widespread disruption of societies throughout the Fertile Crescent and the Levant. George Mendenhall writes, "With very few exceptions, every excavated site from Palestine and Syria to Greece shows the remains of destruction by violence during the period from 1250 to 1150 B.C."[51] The deserts were advancing and the pastoral nomads from across the deserts were forced to infiltrate the agrarian towns and villages in Palestine.

A reading of the Book of Joshua and Judges informs us that there were intermittent campaigns and gradual assimilation of Israelites into Canaan. Although there were some pitched battles between the migrating Israelites, these were mainly guerrilla infiltration. There was no total liquidation of the Canaanites. Canaan at this time was a land of disparate peoples. Canaanites lived primarily along the seacoasts and in pockets in the central and southern mountains. Non-Semitic groups like Hittites and Horites were also found in Canaan. The political and social structures were characterized by the existence

of city-states surrounded by agrarian communities. By the thirteenth century, the number of city-states had notably increased.[52] As we showed earlier, many of these early city-states were without walls. But when they come under frequent attacks from the marauding tribes like the Hebrews, they quickly erected walls and fortified themselves. The city of Jericho was repeatedly walled, while Ai was unwalled when Joshua and the tribes invaded Canaan.[53] Some cities crumbled while a number of walled cities were left intact. "In summary," concludes Mendenhall, "there was no real conquest of Palestine at all; what happened instead may be termed . . . a peasant's revolt against the network of interlocking Canaanite city-states."[54]

The memory of Exodus experience and the conquest of Canaan became an important milestone in the evolution of Hebrew religious consciousness and worldview. A decisive shift of the theistic ground takes place. We see this shift in the Sinai covenant -- a new covenant between Yahweh and Israel, which reads, "You are my people, and I am your God." God revealed himself to Moses under the name of "Yahweh." Yahweh is not only the creator of the universe, but also one who associates with a people. Yahweh does this by choosing a people and influencing their history. Israel itself was a creation of divine action in time. It was felt that God not only cared for his people but also ordered the events for their good. The Exodus experience brought a new historical perspective and sense of destiny to Hebrew theism, which was unique among the nations of the ancient Near East. Since the experience of Exodus, Yahweh, the God of Israel, was looked upon as a liberator and savior – one who extricates God's people from oppression and gives a new lease of life in concrete historical circumstances.

Israelites now began to see Yahweh in "human" terms as one who participates and shares human experiences of love, joy, and pain. The divine nature can be reflected best in human personality and to Yahweh were attributed many human personality traits. The essential knowledge and revelation of the divine to humans and God's purpose for human presence could come only through personal revelation between two persons. Humans alone were created in the image of God and not the world of nature (Gen. 1:26, 27).

Therefore, human beings and not the world of nature have the potential to be in communion with God and share in the divine life. So forceful was the anthropomorphism of Hebrew theism that no image or idol could possibly be identified as the representation of Yahweh. Israelites in the Promised Land were prohibited from representing Yahweh in any tangible objects of nature. Nevertheless, we find that the Book of Psalms and the writings of the Old Testament prophets contain passages that express nature as a manifestation of God. But these were views that were proffered later when Israel emerged as a nation under monarchy.

The migrating Hebrews were pastoral people. Initially their pastoral cults were somewhat antagonistic toward the agrarian cults in Canaan. Canaanite cults were polytheistic and it did not square well with the monotheism of Yahweh. A way had to be found to integrate both monotheism and polytheism, agrarian and pastoral cults. The Exodus experience came to set the tone of the essential relationship humans would have with nature. Yahweh was seen more as the god of history than the god of the land. And to humans God has entrusted the stewardship of the created world. The essential doctrine of the human place in creation – humans above nature – was thus fostered by the Israelites' confrontation with Canaanite agrarian cults.

However this confrontation with the nature cults of Canaan was not as thoroughgoing as one would have expected. For one thing, despite the central place of the memory of the Exodus in the Hebrew tradition, many who later assimilated themselves with the Hebrew people were also descendants of the previous inhabitants of the land. Besides, the migrating Israelites were going through a phase of cultural transition in adapting to a sedentary agrarian lifestyle from that of a nomadic pastoral life. Israelites were in the process of settling down and changing to new ways of life, particularly farming. The Canaanites "high places" for worship of Baal and Astartes still remained in the land. Baal was already in possession of the land. Many felt the need to propitiate Baal, the god of fertility. Yahweh was the God of history who liberated Israel from Egypt. Yahweh could easily be molded by the pastoral motifs. Now there was the practical need to

ensure fertility and abundant crops. The God of History did not square well with the modes of agrarian life. With the adoption of Canaanite methods of farming, absorbing Canaanite rites and cults seemed the only logical course. Syncretism was often the result. For many, Yahweh took on the features of Baal, a practical identity with him. It was thought that it was all right to make a pilgrimage occasionally to the sanctuary at Shiloh. But the Canaanite high places were closer and the rites were attractive. And the excesses and the vitality of the Canaanite cults enchanted the Israelites. In this dilemma, Yahweh had to yield to the cyclical demands of the agrarian ethos. Yahweh called on his people to observe holy days and offer him the first fruits of harvests and offer animal sacrifices to appease him.

With the conquest of Canaan and the gradual assimilation of Canaanite natives within the dominant Israelite society, the pastoral cults of the Israelites began slowly to give way to the Canaanite agrarian culture. The Patriarchal and Exodus theism was gradually harmonized with the new agrarian life style for which Israel had opted. Agrarian and urban life demanded cults that would create tangible objects of worship, symbols of meaning that attest to the cycles of nature, sacrifices that propitiate the malevolent forces of nature, rituals that invoke fecundity, and festivals that celebrate the change of seasons and the bounties of nature. Attempts were made to rehabilitate Baal and Ashtoreth, the chiefs of the Canaanite-Phoenician divine consortium. Idol worship and planting of sacred groves became widespread throughout Israel. It was in this context of the apostasy that the prophetic schools emerged in Israel. Old Testament prophets denounced Baal worship and called Israel to forsake the fertility cults of the natives and return to the God of Exodus.

Over the years, the new settlers became quite adapted to the sedentary agrarian life style. Nevertheless, as always, agrarian settlements came under frequent attacks from neighboring states. In the eleventh century, the greatest single threat to Israel's existence came from the Philistines, who had established their city-states in pockets along the coastal plain. The Philistine threat forced the tribes of Israel to unite under a king in the

face of a common enemy. It was the ecological and economic security needs – protecting one's own crops and grain stocks from frequent pillaging -- that drove Israel to form into a kingdom. King Saul united the southern tribes to fight the Philistines. Following Saul, King David united the whole nation under one single central authority and made Jerusalem the center of Israel's cult and administration. David's rule lasted for nearly 40 years, c.1000-962 B.C.E. David's kingdom was remembered as reaching from Ezion-geber on the Gulf of Aqabah to Homs, from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates. This was a period when Israel's identity came to be centered on the institution of the monarchy, rather than the Exodus experience or the rural agrarian motifs. Israel had never experienced this imperial existence. Israel's monarchy fused together the different historical and cultural strains – patriarchal, pastoral, agrarian and historical (Exodus experience) in the articulation of a syncretistic cult -- the Zionistic Covenant.[55]

Central to the Zionistic Covenant (alternatively called the Davidic Covenant – because the house of David claimed that God had made this covenant with him and his lineage) was the idea that the monarchy symbolized the essential nature of human-world existence. In terms of eco-sensibility, the monarchical era was indeed a landmark. For it was during this time that the sedentary agrarian and pastoral existence attained a level of accommodation and harmony. King David himself hailed from a herding clan. As a tactical move, he incorporated both the pastoral and the agrarian cults with the cult of Yahweh and made Jerusalem the center for Yahweh worship. People held that the land was gifted to them under a covenant agreement between Yahweh and Israel. Jerusalem, the city occupied and expanded by David, and the Temple built by his son Solomon came to symbolize this covenant. The implicit understanding of the covenant was that the unfailing adherence to the obligations of the agreement would bring all around prosperity and the blessings of fecundity for the fields and the cattle and peace from their enemies.

The period of Israel's monarchy was also a time when Hebrew theism was interpreted in holistic, and not exclusively historical, categories. The force of Exodus historicism on the Hebrew worldview was tempered with ecological and social motifs. Models for

Israel's nation-state – the monarchy, the priestcraft, the legal codes and the temple -- were borrowed liberally from Israel's neighbors in the Fertile Crescent and Egypt. Even Solomon's temple was built to the Syro-Phoenician temple architecture.[56] Israel was a latecomer to the civilization and to the statehood. Yet, it was Israel's social philosophy based on the covenant ideology that made Israel one of the most socially and environmentally sophisticated society in the Fertile Crescent.

Covenant and the Prophetic Movement

Throughout the four centuries of monarchy, which began around 1020 B.C.E., the Hebrew religious worldview was anchored to the covenantal theology. Covenantal existence infused a sense of permanence and continuity in the political and cultural processes of Jewish nation. A feature of the covenant theology was its rootedness to the land and soil and the blessings of fecundity. This covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel and the land during the period of the monarchy exuded a remarkable holistic and eco-sensible philosophy of life.

Israel understood these organic living relationships with one's own environment as fundamental to the welfare of social, religious and cultural life. Unlike the Patriarchs, who wandered about over the land with their cattle, the people of Israel were now rooted deeply in the land, soil, mountains, and seas. Together with Israel, Yahweh was also grounded to the land. Yahweh could now reveal himself to Israel only through down-to-earth metaphors. Yahweh's covenant with Israel was experienced more in terms of the fecundity of soil and livestock. Yahweh was experienced as one who fecundates the whole world of nature and makes it come alive by his immanence and his continuous creative activity. Yahweh was near and as concrete as a good shepherd who made Yahweh's people lie down in green pastures and led them beside the still waters. Yahweh has chosen the people of Israel as his people and the land of Canaan as his place on earth. The temple at Jerusalem, the cultic site of Judaic religion, was symbolic of this covenant relationship. The continuity of the royal dynasty of David and his son Solomon

was another sign of security and Jerusalem, the city of peace, came to symbolize the covenantal blessings.

Covenant ideology was remembered as offering a unique frame of reference for Israel's worldviews and human-world existence. Israel's polity during its four centuries of monarchy was under-girded by covenant existence. The ideology mandated a human-world existence that reflected Yahweh's holiness and justice. It could not be otherwise. Yahweh bestowed the land upon his people. Yahweh is the creator, the sustainer and the life-giver of Israel and their land. And therefore, Yahweh alone must be worshiped and his laws strictly obeyed. No nature deities should be entertained in the Promised Land. Yahweh is jealous and does not tolerate any rivals. On the other hand, Yahweh is holy and just and so Yahweh's character and righteousness must guide all social, personal and environmental relations and existence. Yahweh will not tolerate injustice, disparities, greed, selfishness and human oppression. Neither will he tolerate the desecration of the land with the cults of the nature deities. In the absence of any democratic institutions, voluntary communes and ideological collectives in the ancient world, the covenant society was indeed unparalleled in offering a vision for a just, peaceful and environmentally sensible society. The covenant ensured an ethical and environmental way of life amidst all competing social ideologies of the ancient world. If observed faithfully, it augurs well for the economic and social justice and restrains human greed and selfishness from degrading the environment.

The covenant established Yahweh's claim on the land. Therefore, the land was integral part of social considerations and ethical reflection. Yahweh says, "the land belongs to me, and you are only strangers and guests of mine" (Lev. 25:23 NJB). The covenant endowed upon each family a share of the land as a gift from God. Rights of tenancy were considered sacred and were zealously protected from power politics and economic manipulation. Since the land was within the scope of ethical concerns, human obligations to the landscape and to the animals that lived on the land came within the purview of the land ethics.[57] But for the covenant ideology, a Sabbath rest for farm

animals and letting the lands lie fallow every seventh year would have been unthinkable.

It is in this context of the covenant that we witness the rise of the prophetic movement in Israel. Prophets played an important role in the religious life of Israel. The prophets were a watchdog group of the covenant. But there were others in the society who claimed to be the guardians of the covenant. The monarch and the priest understood and interpreted covenant promises in relation to their own function in the society. Monarchs and priests had personal stakes in interpreting it to their own advantage and to maintain the status quo. We see evidence of this in the way David and Solomon presented the monarchy as the continuation of Yahweh's covenant made with the patriarchs. They did this to legitimize their dynastic throne. Priestly chroniclers in Jerusalem also slanted the covenant to establish the primacy of the temple at Jerusalem and the Torah as the cultic symbols of the covenant and Israel's history. They did this to contend the competing cultic sites of the Northern Kingdom. Thus, we see, vested interests used covenant motifs for their own advantage. In the midst of this strife, we observe the rise of the prophetic movement and prophets' rendering on the covenant. Boldly they reproved the deceit and deceptions of the monarchy, the priesthood and all institutions and powers that deviated from the covenant existence. By doing so, the prophets raised peoples' consciousness to the evils of materialism, social injustice and greed.

Like the movers and shakers of other axial traditions, Hebrew prophets ushered the Judaic religion into the axial age. Unlike the mystics and ascetics of India who sought escape from the troubled society in the solace of the Himalayan forests, Hebrew prophets lived in the society and actively participated in reforming it. On the other hand, Hebrew prophets were also not like the Greek philosophers who dabbled in abstractions. Prophets were commoners who experienced life in all its harshness. Some of them pursued pastoral and agrarian occupations. Amos was a shepherd from the town of Tekoa (Amos 1:1). Elisha was a farmer before he followed Prophet Elijah (1 Kings 19:19). Some prophets also served in the royal courts and in the temple. The worldviews of the prophets were grounded on covenant promises. With the aid of covenant theology, these

prophets filtered and critically audited all power structures, social institutions, relations, individuals, communities, cultures, social mores, cultic habits and all environmental and social events. No aspect of social and personal life escaped their scrutiny. As such, Hebrew "prophecies" of the monarchical times were filled with the contents of contemporary events, not with pre-cognitive predictions about the future.

Among the many things observed were the land, the fields, the crops and the cattle. They commented extensively on the natural calamities – earthquake, desiccation, drought, famine, plagues etc. But all these environmental events and phenomena were filtered through the covenant scope and the obligations of the covenantal existence. Prophets interpreted the natural calamities like drought or the defeat of Israel in wars as a direct result of the failure of Israel to observe covenantal obligations. When the rains came and the harvest was abundant, it was interpreted as Yahweh's favor on Israel for honoring the obligations of the covenantal existence. The prophet Elijah kept a close watch on the weather conditions in Israel. When the rains failed and drought continued for three years, he read this as a sign of Yahweh's displeasure on the apostasy of King Ahab and his subjects. During the reign of Ahab, the Northern Kingdom had revived the nature cults of Baal and Asherah. When the disruption of the seasonal rains caused a drought on the land for three years, Elijah interpreted these natural calamities as the punishment sent by Yahweh on Israel for its apostasy – apostasy that sought to restore the worship of nature deities of Canaan and the alien deities brought in by Jezebel.

Covenant theology is essentially a land ideology. It dictates land ethics – ethics by which Israel would organize its society. Not only does it dictate how Israel would deal with the environment, it dictates also, how the people of Israel will relate to one another as individuals and communities. Land ethics demand that the society be organized in such a manner that it will allow equal access to every one for all communal and environmental resources. All communities and individuals -- both rural and urban, monarch and commoner -- are equal before Yahweh. Therefore no social disparities and economic injustices are acceptable. Against this norm, all institutions and power

structures should be weighed in the balance from time to time. But sadly, Israel and its institutions were almost always found wanting by the prophets. Therefore, Yahweh had to withhold the latter rain and the dew on the land. Prophets interpreted the frequent visitation of natural calamities as Yahweh's punishment for the injustice and oppression perpetrated in Israel's society. Issues of economic and social justice were high on the agenda of the prophetic mission in the Old Testament. Oppression of the poor, the powerless, and the neglect of orphans and widows could not be ignored. Injustice and corruption at any level – from the monarch to the judges to the priests to the big landholders – received scathing attacks from the Prophets. God surely espouses the cause of the poor and righteous. The prophet Amos railed against the evil judges in Israel who condemned the righteous people for the sake of bribes. Amos vehemently attacked the sins of exploiting the poor (Amos 2:6, 7; 4:1; 5:11; and 8:6). Hosea and Habakkuk were enraged by the enormous economic disparity that existed in Israel. While the rich lived in mansions, the poor had no place to live. The homes of the judges in Samaria were built with hewn stone (Isa. 9:10). Much of their ill-gotten wealth was obtained by trampling the poor and distorting the just causes of the poor in favor of the powerful and wealthy. The taxes collected from the poor were spent on the rich, instead of being returned it to the needy (Amos 3:9-10).

The high point of Israel's prophetic movement belongs inseparably to the four centuries of Israel's nationhood. The covenant ideology turned the prophets into radical critics of the society who advocated revolutionary social changes. But for all practical purposes, Hebrew prophets were loners. They did have a following, but they did not have a strategy or the organization to bring about the changes they anticipated. Nevertheless, the prophetic movement kept the Israel's cult and faith alive and relevant to her social and environmental exigencies amidst the gloomiest of historical, political and environmental prospects of the Fertile Crescent.

The prophetic movement inspired a critical reflection on society. Prophets proffered and refined the covenant for every generation. They were the conscience of the society.

Prophets exposed the anomalies between the covenant ideals and the actualities of the social existence. The prophetic movement continued during exilic and post-exilic times. But these prophets always anchored their message in a vision of Israel as a nation under Yahweh in a covenant relationship. The Hebrew prophetic movement is a unique religious phenomenon of the ancient world. But for the Hebrew prophets, Israel's cult would have never seen the axial light and probably might have been numbered among the demised national cults of the Fertile Crescent. Prophets' messages and oracles were treasured as Yahweh's word. Therefore the prophets' messages were committed to writing and eventually canonized.

Exilic Episode: A Consequence of the Environmental Crisis

After a brief tenure of peace during the reign of Solomon, Israel was split into two separate states. Solomon's greed and opulent ways of living placed a heavy burden on the people of the land. Natural resources of the land and surrounding regions were exploited and the Cedars of Lebanon were cut down and imported for building projects in Jerusalem. The Northern Kingdom, under the political ambitions of Jeroboam, went its own separate way about 922 B.C.E., developing its own religious rites, which were in tune with the agrarian ideals of the land. Jeroboam identified Yahweh with the bull image and thus hastened the absorption of the agrarian motifs with the historical deity. By doing so Jeroboam won the loyalty of his subjects and moved them away from devotion to the temple in Jerusalem. The North and the South were engaged in intermittent wars from the time of the division of the monarchy throughout their existence as two separate political entities.

The relatively prolonged peace and prosperity of Israel and Judah came under increasing threat from Syria and later from Assyria. The agrarian economies of both Syria and Assyria were failing at this time and these empires, as we have shown earlier, were forced to exploit and plunder the neighboring city-states, forcing them to render tributes. Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 B.C.E.) conducted a series of campaigns against the

Northern Kingdom, which finally fell during the last years of Jeroboam II (746-721 B.C.E). In the south, the Kingdom of Judah came under increasing attack from Babylon. Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed in 587 B.C.E. by the armies of Nebuchadrezzar and many of the people of Judah were led away as captives.

The people of the Northern Kingdom were scattered all over the Fertile Crescent, especially in the provinces of Assyria.[58] The captives from Judah were led away and settled in Babylon. They were forced into hard manual labor -- to dig, dredge and drain the irrigation canals of the Euphrates and Tigris. Life in Assyria and Babylon was anything but a luxury. James D. Newsome, Jr., writes,

> Some few were impressed into various forms of manual service by the Babylonian government; but most were settled, by family unit, outside the walls of Babylon onto land which had been newly irrigated as a part of Nebuchadrezzar's scheme of public works. There they were set to work claiming this soil for agriculture and raising crops with which to feed Babylon's burgeoning population . . . . If any among this first group of Jewish exiles was delighted at Nebuchadrezzar's sufferance, however, that delight rapidly evaporated in the searing Mesopotamian heat. Few of the exiles were accustomed to such conditions of climate and labor . . . . [T]he loss of their land and their deportation to this alien and inhospitable terrain implied the loss of their identity as Jews and their forfeiture of the spiritual traditions of Abraham, Moses, and David.[59]

The downfall of Israel's monarchy and of the temple and Zion began to raise serious questions about Israel's faith -- the credibility of the Covenants. Even the credibility of Yahweh came under question. Exilic experience was interpreted as the defeat of Israel's God – the god who until then was thought to be rooted to the land of Canaan that was gifted to Israel. The Jewish captives were therefore forced to rethink their theology and redefine their relationship to their native land and Yahweh. The captives needed an explanation for the evil that had befallen them – the shattering blow to their belief in the inviolability of their land, temple, the city of Zion and Yahweh's covenant with Abraham, Moses and David. They demanded an explanation.

The disillusionment of the exilic experience encouraged two somewhat contrasting

tendencies in the Jewish religious thought. The collapse of Israel's national identity brought about an intense awareness of its calling, a point of view championed by the priestly tradition. The alien surroundings were regarded as a threat to Israel's faith. Israel was to be a holy people separated from other nations and cultures by the purity of its life and faithfulness to Yahweh. On the other hand, the exilic experience also awakened a new world-consciousness. Israel's faith was enlarged by the vision of global horizons. Israel now had to look beyond its own circumscribed community and biological niche to the whole wide world. The time was now ripe for understanding God's purpose beyond their own narrow national history to encompass the whole wide world, all nations and peoples and all ages.[60]

These two strands of thought came to have significant implications for the post-exilic Jewish religion, worldviews and treatment of the environment. First, we begin to observe the captives in Babylon encountering the dualistic philosophies and cults of these great empires. As we have noted earlier, the desert cults of Mesopotamia were shot through and through with dualistic motifs. Notable among them was Zoroastrianism. Although now a relatively small religion, Zoroastrianism was a major religion of the Fertile Crescent from the time of the Exile up until the advent of Islam in the seventh century after Christ. The Prophet Zoroaster (ca.630-550 B.C.E.) gave shape to this desert cult. Zoroaster was a contemporary of many axial personalities like Buddha, Confucius, Lao-tzu, the prophets of Israel and the early philosophers of Greece.

The Babylonian cults and Zoroastrian religion in particular, embodied a dualistic worldview with attendant myths and metaphors. Dualism was the answer. Mesopotamian desert societies were predisposed to dualistic gestalts derived from their harsh environment. Yahweh could still be absolved of his incapacity in preventing the great catastrophe. Yahweh could not be the source of injustice, evil, suffering, pain and calamity. Identifying an enemy of Yahweh became a possibility. Babylonian cults offered many candidates for such an honor. In the Zoroastrian cult, Satan was thought of as the principal source of evil. The idea of Satan as the ultimate source of evil and an

enemy of Yahweh was advanced and articulated during exilic times. Not only Satan, but many other dualistic myths and concepts such as heaven and hell, light and darkness, Armageddon – the great final battle between the forces of good and evil -- final judgement, the physical resurrection of the dead, and eternity were absorbed into Jewish theology and worldviews. The organic worldview of monarchical Judaism was now reframed through dualistic motifs. Satan, the great serpent, destroys God's good creation and works against God's kingdom and rule. God transcends all kingdoms, powers and principalities. Satan, together with other fallen angels, rules the underworld, including the kingdoms of this terrestrial world.

An important corollary of this dualistic motif was the articulation of religious aspirations and hopes in apocalyptic terms. Apocalypticism anticipates the culmination of the historical process and the final consummation and resolution of dualistic conflicts and tensions. It is often expressed as the victory of good over evil in a marvelous historical renewal. Apocalyptic oracles predict the cessation of unresolved human predicaments. The Judaism of exilic times was struggling to keep its faith alive during a period of uncertain historical prospects. The uncertain, despairing future forced the captives to borrow Persian dualistic and eschatological tenets. The captives yearned for their homeland. Eschatological projections promised a hopeful future and kept the sagging morale of the captives upbeat amidst the gloomiest historical prospects.

Having lost their homeland and the cultic site – the temple and the attendant cults -- Jews of the exile sought to peg their faith to other forms of cultic expressions.[61] Cultic practices like circumcision and Sabbath observance became the source of their unity. Indeed, this period witnessed intense religious activity. Israel's traditions were gathered and committed to writing. Israel's hopes and aspirations were no longer anchored to a biological niche, but to a history – history with a teleology and eschatological hope. The way Israel's religion developed among the exiles gradually became determinative for all Judaism and the basis of early Christian thought.

Eschatological and apocalyptic readings of history encourage an otherworldly

disposition, and negate contemporary material and physical existence at the expense of the hope of the ideal world to come. Such dispositions are contemptuous of the world of reality and often take an anti-nature stance. An eschatological and apocalyptic view of history is integral to Christian faith and has earned a place in the credal confession. The Second Coming of Christ captivated the imaginations of early Christians. The seed of an otherworldly disposition and the contempt toward nature found in primitive Christianity might well have been sown at the time when exilic Jews assimilated Persian dualistic and eschatological motifs. Dualistic motifs of Christianity have been accentuated greatly through modern industrial cultures. Disenchantment with the world of nature is a byproduct of these dualistic and eschatological dispositions of Christianity.

The exilic time in Babylon was a period when much of the Old Testament canon was redacted and compiled. Several Jewish exiles called "scribes" took to copying, editing and preserving the Torah as a full-time profession. Babylonian and Persian religious ideas influenced the Jews and later the Christians. Myths like the chaos-creation and flood stories, a cosmic savior, virgin birth, resurrection of the dead, heaven, hell, angels, demons, and the new-birth (regenerative spiritual experiences), which are fundamental to primitive Christianity, were borrowed from Babylonian and Persian myths and incorporated in the sacred canon.

The eschatological disposition is characteristic of people without a land – refugees, landless labor and aliens in a foreign land. Daniel Smith calls their worldview the "Fourth World" perspective. In modern sociological literature, exiled peoples have come to be included among those known as the "the Fourth World." These are "peoples without countries of their own, peoples who are usually in the minority, and without the power to direct the course of their collective lives."[62] Such people tend to develop rich eschatological myths. They do not own the lands on which they labor and hold no affinity or love for the land or the environment. Their views on nature cannot therefore be normative for any eco-sensible human-world relations and they can only be regarded as "pragmatic ambivalence." The Babylonian exiles also should be numbered among the

"Fourth World" people.

In 539 B.C.E., Cyrus defeated the Medes and Babylonians and established the Persian Empire. The empires of Babylon and the Medes were so weakened by failures on all fronts that it was easy for Cyrus to sweep across the Fertile Crescent. He was extraordinarily benevolent and humane, and he respected the religious traditions of the various ethnic groups within his empire. Cyrus was pragmatic enough to allow the exiles to return to their homelands. This was radically opposed to the Assyrian and Babylonian practice of deporting conquered populations.[63] He did not pursue the imperial practice of emperor worship; instead, he encouraged the ethnic peoples within his empire to follow their own religious traditions and cults. The apparent change of heart in the imperial policies of the Fertile Crescent attracts the attention of Green Historians. The imperial polices of forceful deportation of conquered people pursued both by Assyrians and later by Babylonians went against the long-term environmental and economic interests of the vassal states and ultimately against the empires. Productive farms were destroyed and abandoned. National economies and centers of powers were dismantled. Food shortages were experienced all over the empire, and especially around the city of Babylon. Massive standing armies necessary to push the imperial frontiers as well as keep the disgruntled provinces in check had to be reduced drastically.

Cyrus allowed the captives to return home. Beginning in 538 B.C.E., bands of captives migrated back to Palestine under the leadership of charismatic nationalists and religious leaders. Given the environmental history of the Fertile Crescent of this period, we have to wonder whether permitting the exiles to return to their homelands was not a pragmatic approach to the otherwise gloomy prospects of starvation due to the widespread failure of the farming economy within the empire. Green History informs us that Babylon was in a weakened state because of failure on the farming front. It was also deprived of the regular supply of tribute from the vassal states. In this weakened state, it was easy for the Persians to sweep across the empire and claim victory without much bloodshed.[64] By the time the Persian Empire was established, the agrarian enterprise was

collapsing all over the Fertile Crescent. The irrigation canals around Babylon and Nippur could not be dredged out and farmlands had to be abandoned.

When the captives returned to their homeland, they found their temple and cities in ruins. Once productive farms had been abandoned or poorly maintained. They had to rebuild their towns, the temple and the walls of Jerusalem. From then on, except for the brief Maccabean period, Israel lacked independent central political and administrative machinery. The country was kept together by cultic observances and the eschatological hope of a Jewish kingdom established by the Messiah. Post-exilic Judaism was characterized by anxiety. In spite of the restoration of their religious cults and agrarian economies, Israel continued to be under foreign domination.

Following the defeat of the Persian armies in Asia Minor in 333 BCE, Alexander marched into Syria and Palestine. He dealt kindly with the Jews. With Alexander also came the over-riding influence of the Hellenistic culture and philosophy. By then Greek philosophy had achieved a high level of sophistication. Nevertheless, by the time the Hellenistic influence could sweep across Palestine and influence the religious thought of Judaism, the Torah had been codified and canonized and it was not open to the intrusion of Greek philosophies. As we showed, the worldviews of the covenant existence were, for the most part, environmentally sound and socially just. Covenant theology offered a holistic view of God, humans and the world. The Old Testament as such was left unscathed by the dualistic motifs of Greek thought. That was left to the Inter-testamental literature.[65] The New Testament also benefited a great deal from the Greek philosophies. Primitive Christianity that grew beyond the borders of Palestine came under the sway of Greek influence. In Christianity, this tendency towards philosophizing became evident especially in the early patristic and apologetic works. Post-exilic Judaism also assimilated a great deal of Greek thought and culture through the Jews who had dispersed through the Mediterranean world. Many of the Jews of the Diaspora had lost their national identity and the use of their mother tongue -- the Aramaic language -- and instead used Greek. With the overriding influence of Hellenism throughout the

Mediterranean world during the Inter-testamental period, the tendency towards philosophizing religious ideas became attractive to Jewish theologians. The Hellenistic way of thinking became increasingly popular in Jewish theological circles, especially in Alexandria where conscious attempts were made to articulate Jewish faith through Greek philosophy.

Jesus Movements in Palestine and in the Greco-Roman World

Jesus comes on the scene in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets. Although Greco-Roman influences affected Jewish culture and traditions, Jesus for the most part lived within the confines of the Jewish culture and traditions. Jesus grew up and worked in Nazareth – a rural agrarian hamlet in Galilee. He was a carpenter by trade. Jesus was schooled in rabbinical traditions of the synagogue and was well versed in the Torah. Old Testament morals and the mandate of the covenant existence colored his worldviews and mission. The annual pilgrimage with his parents to the Jerusalem temple exposed him to a variety of social and sectarian groups and cross-cultural ideas.

What environmental views did Jesus and his immediate followers entertain? It is difficult to say. Nevertheless, metaphors and conceptual categories of Jesus' teachings and parables offer insights into his views on society and environment. The parables on Laborers in Vineyard, the Lost Sheep, the Mustard Seed, the Fishing Net, the Sower, Weeds, the Lost Sheep and the Pound provide us glimpses into his feel for the Galileans country side. At the same time, Jesus' parables and teachings also show the level of his awareness about social and political issues of his day. The parable on the Rich Man and Lazarus, the Good Samaritan, the Great Supper, Pharisee and Publican, the Rich Fool, the Unjust Judge, the Unmerciful Servant and the Wicked Tenants show his familiarity with the social concerns. His healing ministries to the blind, lepers, the paralytic, the epileptic, the lame, the deaf and his raising of Lazarus and others from the dead identify him with human sufferings and predicaments.

At the time of his baptism, as the Scriptures record, Jesus was filled with the Spirit

and was led into the wilderness for an extended period solitude and reflection. During his time in the wilderness, Jesus encountered nature in all its ruggedness. The Gospel of Mark notes that Jesus was in the midst of the wild beasts (Mark 1:13). Was this a reference to the vanishing animal species of the savannas at the desert edges – lions, foxes and the like? On the other hand, is this a reference to the "Messianic Paradise" regained as envisioned by Prophet Isaiah (Isa.11:6-9; 65:25)? The solitariness of the desert surroundings sharpened his self-awareness. The "temptations" in the wilderness reflect his wrestling with the metaphysical issues in relation to his call. Did the wilderness experience make him heed the call of the environment and provide him the grounding for his mission in the world? Indeed, the deserts surrounding the River Jordan were one of the most exploited environments in Palestine. Besides, the region had been a theater for many battles waged through the milleniums. Richard Austin writes,

> For nine hundred years, since King Solomon of Israel and King Hiram of Tyre had begun intensive logging of the cedars of Lebanon, the Jordan watershed had been deteriorating. Farming without respite, brushcutting, and overgrazing had further reduced the capacity of the watershed to hold moisture and retain its thin topsoil. When the rains came the Jordan and its tributaries now flooded more quickly; in the long dry summer, the flow was more sluggish than before. Beyond the Jordan, the whole Fertile Crescent – that cradle of civilization spanning the Mediterranean coast to the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates – was declining.[66]

Might Jesus have reflected about the degraded wilderness of the Jordan River valley? We find that it was into this wilderness region that Jesus withdrew repeatedly throughout his ministry for solitary moments of prayer and communion with God. Was the cause of environment integral part of his mission? Richard Austin thinks so.[67]

Soon after his returns from the wilderness, Jesus began proclaiming the coming of God's Kingdom. Jesus' mandate to proclaim God's Kingdom was based on Prophet Isaiah's call to celebrate the year of the Jubilee.

> The spirit of the Lord has been given to me,
> For [God] has anointed me.
> [God] has sent me to bring the good news to the poor,

> to proclaim liberty to captives
> and to the blind new sight,
> to set the downtrodden free,
> to proclaim the Lord's year of favor. (Luke 4:18-19, JB, alt.)

The worldviews of Jesus were colored by covenantal motifs found in the Old Testament. The covenantal existence was both social and environmental. Jesus was surely well aware of Isaiah's vision of an ideal covenant existence that was free from all social and environmental oppressions.

> Then the wolf shall live with the sheep,
> And the leopard lie down with the kid;
> The calf and the young lion shall grow up together,
> And a little child shall lead them;
> The cow and the bear shall be friends,
> And their young shall lie down together, ...
> They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain;
> For as the waters fill the sea,
> So shall the land be filled with the knowledge of the Lord.
> (Isa.11:6-9, NEB)

What implications might this vision hold for Jesus' mission in the world? Luke writes that Jesus "returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee" (Luke 4:14 KJV). Jürgen Moltmann observes that "Jesus' public ministry began with his proclamation of the messianic Sabbath in Nazareth."[68] John Howard Yoder says that when Jesus presented him as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, his audience were reminded of "the Jubilee year, the time when the inequities accumulated through the years are to be crossed off and all God's people will begin again at the same point."[69] The "Kingdom of God" which Jesus preached was down to earth. It did not signify cessation of history nor withdrawal from society. Rather it promised the renewal of history, society and the world of nature. Jesus taught his disciples to pray for the coming of God's kingdom where God's yearnings will be fulfilled. God's kingdom on earth will cancel all debts and set all slaves, captives and prisoners free. Nature will be renewed again and made bountiful.

Jesus' life, teachings and work symbolize God's gracious bounties manifest in nature

and in social relations. His miracles testify to the exigency for non-exploitative and trusting relationships with one's neighbors and the world of nature. After a disappointing night of fishing, Peter and Andrew cast their net in the lake Galilee at the command of Jesus. Overwhelmed by the bountiful catch, Peter and Andrew abandoned the fishing profession and followed Jesus. The miracle of "the feeding of the five thousand" symbolizes God's gracious provisions for human physical needs. The parables of Jesus were drawn from the rustic rural scenes and urban settings. Jesus spoke about the sparrows and the lilies of the field and how God cares, feeds and clothes them with splendor. He talked about the vine and the sheep. Unlike the ascetic mendicants and some prophets, Jesus was at home in varied social and environmental settings. He participated in the wedding, festivals, the synagogue worship and banquets. He visited the homes of the sick and the dying. He frequented the wilderness, walked by the lakeshore and sought the solitude of the Judean hills.

In all respects, the Kingdom of God, which Jesus announced, is relevant to human life on this planet. The ethics of God's reign on earth seek the liberation of individuals and societies from bondage that thwarts human happiness and fulfillment. Human health and happiness demand peaceful and gentle co-existence on all fronts – social, environmental and political. Therefore, the cause of nature and society is relevant to the essentials of Christian existence. Jesus' proclamation of God's reign on earth must be seen as a new beginning rather than "an ultimate state of static righteousness."[70] Jesus called the people to repentance. Repentance was a condition for admission into God's kingdom. It was a call to rebuild a righteous society free from all oppressions.

Did Jesus' mission accomplish all that he envisioned in the proclamation of God's kingdom on earth? Richard Austin believes that "if Jesus' initial proclamation of a new kingdom had been overwhelmingly successful, redistribution of land and wealth would have ensued in Palestine."[71] But that did not happen. For one thing, Jesus did not plan and execute social action schemes. Nor did he initiate class-wars.[72] Had Jesus initiated a social revolution, the Roman powers would have crushed it right away. Jesus might have

envisioned a political transformation that sought to reinstate the pre-monarchial order of Israel in which God directly ruled. But Jesus' vision did not contain any strategies, nor a time frame for anticipated changes. Therefore, the Kingdom of God, which Jesus envisioned and for which he gave his life, remained an ethical force for moral and social transformation.

Early Christianity spread initially throughout the Palestine countryside. Wayne Meeks says, "The beginnings of the Christian movement were in the rural and village culture of Palestine."[73] Indeed, Jesus had admonished his disciples to return to Galilee (Mark 14:28; 16:7). Surely, having been exposed to the radical social and environmental worldviews and teachings of Jesus, these first Christian cells must have functioned like "basic communities." Unfortunately, not much is known about this phase of the Jesus movement. Instead, we read more about the Jesus movement in Jerusalem. Initially, the Jesus movement was written off as a marginal sect within the larger Judaic religion. As the days went by, the distinction between the Jesus movement in Jerusalem and the Jewish religion became more cogence. The Jewish leadership in Jerusalem sought to suppress the movement in Jerusalem. Persecution drove the First Christians from Jerusalem to the urban centers of the Greco-Roman world. From all accounts, it is clear that the Christians groups in cities like Damascus and Antioch experienced phenomenal growth and were successful.[74] It was the success of these Christian groups in the cities that incited Paul's animosity and "zealot" attack on them. After his conversion to the Jesus movement, Paul pushed the frontiers of the movement into the Greco-Roman world. Wayne Meeks writes,

> [W]ithin a decade of the crucifixion of Jesus, the village culture of Palestine had been left behind, and the Greco-Roman city became the dominant environment of the Christian movement. So it remained, from the dispersion of the "Hellenistis" from Jerusalem until well after the time of Constantine. The movement had crossed the most fundamental division in the society of the Roman Empire, that between rural people and city dwellers, and the results were to prove momentous.[75]

Christian communities spread through the commercial centers of the Roman Empire. The Hebrew land ethics and the covenantal existence had little relevance in this new situation. Austin concluded, "The texture of the Galilee landscape and Jesus' compassion for nature survived in his parables, but his ethical intentions for the land were largely forgotten."[76]

The Apostle Paul was essentially a city person. As a Jew of the Diaspora, Paul grew up in Tarsus, a Hellenized city. He spoke and wrote Greek fluently. Paul's writings evoke a classroom scene rather than a farm. The metaphors of his rhetoric are drawn from gymnasium, stadium and public squares of the Greco-Roman cities.[77] Paul's worldviews were essentially urban and reflected the city culture of the Greco-Roman world. During the time of Paul, the cities of the Mediterranean world were at the leading edge of political and social changes. Cities of Greece gave to the world the ideals of democracy and justice based on a rational approach to life. Paul was obviously fascinated with the Greek ideals, culture and philosophies. He took advantage of the Roman travel and communication systems and the maritime and martial security to plant churches in Asia Minor.[78]

As we had shown, the environment of the Mediterranean world had steadily deteriorated during the closing centuries of the first millenium B.C.E. The immediate environment surrounding the cities of the classical Greece had deteriorated considerably. The same was true of the cities of the Roman Empire. Because of this, the cities of the Greco-Roman world exerted more pressure on the countryside for food and resources. Rural economies and villages surrounding the cities suffered the most. This brought added animosity and disparity between cities and the countryside. Wayne Meeks says,

> As the cities grew in number and power, their relations with the countryside became more and more ambivalent. Each depended upon the other, but by every measure of physical and social advantage the symbiosis was one-sided in favor of the city. Under the principate agriculture continued to be the base of the whole empire's economy, but ownership of productive land was increasingly concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer proprietors – who lived in the city or its

> extension, their villas. The small, independent landowners living on their own land began to disappear, reduced to tenancy or slavery, gone to the city to subsist as laborers, or recruited into the army.[79]

Axial movement had its origin and triumph in urban contexts. We observe the bias for city-life among the early Christian groups. Primitive Christianity grew among the Jews of the Diaspora who lived in the cities of the Greco-Roman world. The collapse of the rural economies brought fresh migration of rural folks into the cities. Early Christian thoughts reflect an uncritical absorption of urban values. The epistles of Paul, the Book of Revelation and many patristic writings show a bias for urban ideals. We see in these literatures a yearning for the coming of a perfect and enduring city – *"the city of God."*[80] Like the moderns, ancient people held urban life and culture to be the height of human sophistication and social perfection. The lure of the city was just as great for ancient people as it is for moderns.

The First Churches planted in the Asia Minor absorbed many of these ancient urban values. Urbanites show contempt toward rural life – toward anything that has to do with the soil and the environment. Besides, these urban Christians were exposed to the crosscurrents of the Greek ideas. Two distinct strains of thought emerged as a result of the Greek philosophical intrusion, which contributed to the worldview of the early church. First, there emerged a forced dichotomy between the spiritual and the material realm. As we showed earlier, this was a direct result of the body-soul dualism of the Pythagorean philosophy and the Plato's form-matter debate. In Greek thought, form was considered sublime and ideal, while matter was base and crude.[81] The spiritual was to be desired above the material. Spirit was good, while body was evil. The material world was considered partly evil and therefore considered fit for destruction.[82] The idea that evil is a product of the material world was integral to Greek classical thought. Matter was considered the seat of evil both in the world and in human personality. This dualism found its way into the Pauline theology and early Patristic thoughts.

The Greek dichotomy between the spiritual and the material realm seeped through into early Christian thought and, therefore, much of the New Testament theology was shot

through with spiritual motifs and linguistics at the expense of material or natural categories.[83] Even Christology -- the doctrine of the person and work of Christ -- despite the doctrine of incarnation, was understood and interpreted in spiritual and otherworldly terms. The justification for accepting the Greek dichotomy was sought in the exegesis of Jewish religious myths. Jews had no word for the category of nature. The only category by which they could understand nature was that it was created by God. That meant that even humans were part of the created order. For the Hebrew mindset, human life as such did not exist in a vacuum. There was no clear distinction between human and natural categories. God created everything within the cosmos. All creatures, therefore, shared the same substance and teleology. The Greek word for nature, "physis," crept into Judaic religious literature only during inter-testamental period and was extensively used in Apocryphal literature. The concept of nature as such is a contribution of Greek thought.

Primitive Christian thought accommodated the Jewish belief that the earth came under the curse of the Creator at the time of the Fall and disobedience of the first human couple, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden. The myth of 'fall' in fact played a much larger role in Christianity than in Judaism. The Creation saga records the pronouncement of this curse on the world. Speaking to Adam, God says,

> Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, you must not eat of it; cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return. (Genesis 3:17-19 NEB)

The desire to be free from this world and the physical body, which are prone to evil and decay, was reflected in the lifestyle of early Christian communities. This finds vivid expression in the New Testament and early patristic works.

Secondly, perhaps the most significant influence of Greek philosophy on Judeo-Christian thought was the concept that time progresses on a linear historical space-time scale. For Jews of the pre-exilic times, the hope of the future was intimately tied up with

the continuation of the Jewish nation and future generations yet to be born. For them, time appeared to proceed in calendarical and cyclical movements and, for all practical purposes, human life terminated with death. With the absorption of Persian ideas during exilic times and Greek thought during the inter-testamental period, the possibility of looking at the historical destiny of the Jewish nation with a teleological space-time reference provided the much needed boost to the sagging morale of the Jews, who were striving to regain their national identity. Early Christians embellished these Greek space-time concepts. This is evident from the projections they infused into such theological dogmas as the Kingdom of God, the Second Coming of Christ, the Final Judgment and apocalyptic events. Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God as something that was to be inaugurated and realized in this world. But Pauline Theology pushed this inauguration beyond this world. It reflected the anxiety of the early Christians who were tormented by severe persecutions from their adversaries. They looked forward to the fulfillment of their religious aspirations in a trans-historical consummation. The contemporary historical process was viewed as being only an intermediary stage of this fulfillment. There was a sense of anxiety and urgency in their ethics. They believed in the imminent return of Christ who was expected to wind up all the historical process, and this, they hoped, would happen during their lifetime. The Apostle Paul in his letter to the church in Thessalonica writes,

> According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. (1Thess. 4:15-17 NIV)

Because of this belief, early Christians lived very simple and chaste lives in shared communal living. Many of them were poor or were slaves. They lived mainly in urban centers of the Greco-Roman world. Any involvement with the world of nature or

farming or material things had a very low premium in the mindset of the early churches. Nature, for all its worth, was a disenchanted entity. And it was this high premium on time and eternity and not on space, or the world up there as against the world out there, that gave the early Christians the integrity, fidelity and urgency they needed to see them through the severe persecutions unleashed on them by the Roman Empire. For primitive Christianity, time and history could progressively proceed in a linear way culminating in the grand finale -- the cessation of history and this world process, making way for the advent of a New Earth and a New Heaven. Time is absolute and must be redeemed while space is relative and redundant.

Summary

Our study has been limited by our search for the actual causes for the axial negativity toward nature. Our attention has been focused mainly on the religious traditions that emerged in the Fertile Crescent and the Levant. Judaism and Christianity are two of the major players in the axial movement. Others who emerged along with them died out or were run over by successful axial traditions. Jewish religion, although it survives with vigor in the contemporary times, is largely confined to its people and the nation of Israel. It is a monotheistic faith. Monotheism, if it should seek to be authentic, should be set in a global context. Jewish faith is universal, but it is wedged to the history of Jewish people and their land. Jews cannot think of themselves as a people apart from their history and the "Promised Land." Their attitude toward nature was very parochial. But it helped them to protect the environment from undue human exploitation. Of course, there were excesses, especially during the Solomon's era. But for the most part, the environment itself was robust and could therefore sustain the societies. It did not disintegrate like the environments of the neighboring lands.

The parallel reading of the green history of Palestine with the history of Israel inform us that Israel cared for its land. Jews possessed practical ecological insight and took measures to protect their environment. But they were also caught up in the

environmental changes that affected the regions of the Fertile Crescent and the Levant. The history of the Israelites was shaped by the environmental vicissitudes of their neighbors and their own land. Palestine was periodically dominated by their neighbors and exploited by military conquests. If left to themselves, Israelites might have prevented some of the extreme damage to their land -- deforestation, erosion, and exhaustion of the soil. Therefore, it is not possible to lay the blame for the environmental degradation of the Palestine on the Jewish people.

Nevertheless, the ecological reading of the Israel's story shows that the attitude of the Israelites toward nature -- from the patriarchal to the axial epochs -- was ambivalent. These attitudes were in a constant state of flux. Their views on nature were shaped by their history and their encounter with the environment both in their own homeland and in the alien lands. No one particular stage of their history and the concomitant worldviews could fully describe the Jewish attitudes toward nature at any particular time. Israel's history and the fate of its environment were often dictated by the environmental vicissitudes of their neighbors in the Fertile Crescent, Egypt and the Levant.

Several strands of thought and tradition – both negative and positive, native and foreign, rural and urban, pastoral and agrarian, and tribal and monarchical – shaped Jewish worldviews and attitudes toward the environment. Israel's religious, environmental and historical gestalts brought a mixed bag of environmental disposition into the axial age. The memories of their sojourn as a people through varied historical and environmental contexts and ethos -- as migrating nomads into Canaan fleeing the collapsing cities of Sumer, as environmental refugees in Egypt, as pastoral nomads eking out a life on the fringes of the Arabian deserts, living as a nation subsisting primarily on an agrarian economy, as captives in Babylon digging irrigation ditches, and as vassals supplying massive amounts of food and resources to sustain the imperial powers that successively overran their land – dowered them with human-world gestalts that can only be characterized as ambivalent and alienating. The sum and substance of these gestalts reflect ambiguous human-world existences and attitudes throughout their history. Every

segment of their sojourn was important to their worldview and awareness as a people. Even so, the exilic experience violently shook their faith in Yahweh, the Promised Land and their history as one imbued with a universal mission. Israelites were uncertain as to their historical destiny and the universal mission. They were constricted by the gestalts of the Promised Land. The Old Testament sealed this Jewish ambivalence toward environment.

During the closing centuries of the first millennium B.C.E., the nation and the people of Israel became a distinctive and puzzling religion. The essential attitudes of the post-exilic Jews toward nature were not ecologically bankrupt. But they were also not overtly affirmative. Jews of the Inter-testamental era shed blood for their land, but that was motivated more by their nationalism and opposition to the imperial oppressions rather than the love of their environment. On the other hand, they had to deal with nature as responsible stewards, since Yahweh had bestowed the land on them, but the land could not ever take the place of Yahweh in Israel's life. The land belonged to Yahweh. For all practical purpose, Israel could live on the land and enjoy its fruits only as tenants and not as owners. The environmental attitude of the tenants, if at all positive, can only be characterized as one of stewardship. No other environmental stances would be appropriate for this situation. The stewardship attitude directed Israel to deal with nature responsibly for pragmatic reasons. The call of their historical destiny and their land gestalts were always in conflict. Israelites cannot worship their environment, but also they cannot reject it. For the Jewish mentality, nature was relative and not sacred. Yahweh alone is sacred and absolute. Humans are distinct from nature and stand above it. After all, ultimately, Yahweh created the world primarily for human ends, and humans were created to glorify Yahweh.

When we turn to Christianity, the story is different. Primitive Christianity took roots initially among the Jews in Palestine and later among the Diaspora. But the Christianity of the Diaspora and not the Christianity of the Palestine became the standard bearer of the Western Christian environmentalism. The first Christians lived mostly in the urban

centers of the Greco-Roman world. Christianity also claims to be monotheistic and seeks to be universal. Therefore, the primitive church had to sever affiliation from any parochial histories and bioregions. Nevertheless, Christianity claimed itself as being in continuity with the historical destiny and the universal mission of the Jewish people. In so doing, Christianity broke free from any association with the land of Israel and its history, while holding on to the essential goal of Israel's history.

Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God and said that it was at hand. Jesus and his followers expected that it would be inaugurated in this world. The Jesus Movement in Palestine was largely a peasant movement. In the synoptic Gospels, the Kingdom of God is presented very much in material terms. In the Gospel of John, the dualistic motives overtake material presentation. On the other hand, Jesus did not envision God's kingdom in the political order of his day. It had to remain merely as a moral force. Unlike the Jesus Movement in Palestine, Pauline Christianity was situated mainly in the urban contexts of the Greco-Roman world. Paul's tractate starts with the premise that neither nature, nor land, nor any principality can serve as the ground for Christian existence. The apostle Paul was influenced by Greek ideas and held that the materiality cannot be the ground or means for any religious existence or experience. For Paul, Christian existence is essentially a spiritual existence. Therefore, the reign of Christ transcends all materiality and values.

Pauline Christianity absorbed much of its dualism from Greek classical philosophies, especially from Gnosticism. While the Gnostics sought to solve the problem of evil through holding the material world as the source of all evil, the Jews of the Diaspora solved the problem of evil in apocalyptic spirituality. In the Jewish faith, the alienation experienced from the tension between the felt injustice of history and faith in the Creator and God of history was solved through apocalypticism.[84] Apocalypticism anticipates the cessation of the temporal world and history and waits the dawn of an enduring realm. Pauline Christianity drew heavily from this Jewish apocalypticism. Together with the Gnostic dualism and the Jewish apocalypticism, the early church of the Greco-Roman

world came up with one of the most bizarre views on environment. Rosemary Ruether says, "Paul's theology draws on a blend of apocalyptic and Gnostic modes of thought."[85] True religion transcends all histories that are rooted to the land and any values that dart form materiality. To be a Christian is to be grounded in God through the person of Jesus Christ, who transcends all histories and the world. No other grounding -- whether it is nature or land or history or values -- is acceptable and can serve as the loci of spiritual existence.

Obviously, such stances would have enormous implications for human world-relations and attitudes humans would have toward nature. Environmentally speaking, such dispositions would mark the First Christians of the Greco-Roman world as one of the most environmentally alienated groups of people. The early Christian groups, especially those that were in rural areas of Palestine and Syria, were "base communities." But when the first Churches took root in the urban contexts of the Greco-Roman world, they were alienated from their homeland, culture, history, larger society as well as nature, especially their rural environment. They felt that they were strangers in a foreign land and that they lived among pagan people. Ultimately, they were alienated from their environment and the world.

People's groups living as aliens and strangers without the supporting contexts of the larger society suffer alienation and anxiety. For them, life in this world is transitory and unfulfilling. To overcome the alienation and anxieties, such groups often turn inward and become tightly knit communes. These communes live in loving and caring relationships. Members share their earthly possessions. They come to have new motives for living and a mission in the world. They develop new cults and faith. This newfound faith offers them the joy and the peace of an ethereal world. They look for the cessation of this world and history to the coming of the New Heaven and the New Earth. For these reasons, these groups often engage in selfless and sacrificial services. Yet for all this, environmentally speaking, they are for the most part alienated and that is reflected in their attitude toward nature. Nature is not the sure foundation of their religious existence

and therefore their attitude toward nature can only be characterized as one of alienation. Human alienation from nature begets human negativity toward nature. And the human negativity toward nature was one of the fundamental legacies the primitive Church brought to the axial revolution.

Notes
Chapter 8
The Axial Revolution in the context of Imperial Cultures

1 Daniel Smith, The Religion of the Landless, 20.

2 Hughes, Ecology in Ancient Civilizations, 39.

3 Ponting, A Green History of the World, 86.

4 Hughes, 39.

5 Ibid., 39.

6 Anderson, Understanding the Old Testament, 50-51.

7 Ponting, 84-85.

8 Hughes, 39.

9 Veronica Ions, Egyptian Mythology (New York: Peter Bedrick Books), 1982.

10 Charles Hartshorne and William L. Reese, Philosophers Speak of God (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 29.

11 Ions, 12.

12 Hughes, 38.

13 "The Hymn to the Aton," trans. John A. Wilson, in Ancient Near Eastern Texts, ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), 370.

14 Ions, 99.

15 Hartshorne and Reese, 29. James Henry Breasted, The Dawn of Conscience (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1933), verses from 284-289, quoted in Hartshorne + Reese, 29.

16 Ions, 92-99.

17 Do we know why Moses was inquisitive about God's name?

18 Mannion, Global Environmental Change, 100.

19 Hughes, 72-74.

20 Mannion, 104-105.

21 Hughes, 48.

22 Ibid., 55-67

23 Ibid., 48-55.

24 Ibid., 148-149.

25 Cobb, Structure of Christian Existence, 78.

26 Ibid., 79.

27 Ibid., 80.

28 Ibid., 80.

29 Empedocles, "Purifications," DK 31 B 121, in An Introduction to Early Greek Philosophy, trans. John Mansley Robinson, (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), 152.

30 J. Baird Callicott, Earth's Insights: A Multicultural Survey of Ecological Ethics from the Mediterranean Basin to the Australian Outback (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 29.

31 Callicott, 29.

32 Plato, Critias, 111.

33 Callicott, 29.

34 Cobb., 152.

35 Ruether, Gaia and God, 122-126.

36 Ferrill, The Origins of War,, 91-147.

37 Cobb., 155.

38 Ibid., 156.

39 Ibid., 74-75.

40 Claiborne, Climate, Man and History, 322-326. Although not conclusive, some scholars have speculated that the changing fortunes of the Ancient Greek civilization was due to the climatalogical changes that affected the Mediterranean region during the close of the Second millennium B.C.E.

41 Ferrill, 91-99.

42 Hughes, 84.

43 Ibid., 75-76.

44 Harvey Cox, The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective (New York: Macmillan, 1966).

45 Hughes, 79.

46 Ibid., 86.

47 Anderson, 34-36.

48 Bright, A History of Israel, page #?

49 Ponting, 71-72.

50 Richard Cartwright Austin, Hope for the Land: Nature in the Bible (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 22.

51 George E. Mendenhall, The Tenth Generation: The Origins of the Biblical Tradition. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1973), 64.

52 Addison G. Wright, et. al., "A History of Israel" in The Jerome Biblical Commentary, ed. Raymond E. Brown, et al. (Bangalore, India: St. Peter's Seminary, 1980), 678.

53 Ibid., 131-33.

54 Mendenhall, 73.

55 Ponting, 76.

56 Anderson, 238-239.

57 Austin, 26-27

58 Anderson, 301-302.

59 James D. Newsome, Jr. By the Waters of Babylon (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), 70-71.

60 Anderson, 467-468.

61 The Jewish synagogues emerged as an alternate the temple at Jerusalem. Elaborate liturgy replaced animal sacrifices. Torah replaced the Ten Commandments.

62 Daniel Smith, 8.

63 Anderson, 470-471.

64 Newsome, 116-117.

65 The term "Inter-testamental" refers to approximately four centuries that occur between the historical narratives of the Old and New Testament, sometimes referred as "silent centuries." Although many religious literatures were produced during this time, none of them are recognized as canonical by the Protestant Church, while Roman Catholics and Orthodox churches recognize fourteen of these books and include them in their Bible. These fourteen books are called Apocrypha and other that do not find any place in any Bibles are called pseudopigraphic literature. The information about the Jewish religion and history during the four centuries prior to the advent of Jesus comes to us mainly through this literature. Much of the Greek thought and influence creeps into this literature and stories.

66 Austin, 41-42.

67 Ibid., 37-42.

68 Moltmann, God in Creation., 291.

69 John Howard Yoder, The Politics of Jesus (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1972), 36

70 Austin, 123.

71 Ibid., 125.

72 Ibid., 123-124.

73 Wayne A. Meeks, The Moral World of the First Christians (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 38.

74 Wayne A. Meeks, The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul (New Haven: Yale University Press,

see date in Bib.

1983), 10.

75 Meeks, The First Urban Christians, 11.

76 Austin, ~~Hope for the Land,~~ 126.

77 Meeks, The First Urban Christians, 9.

78 Ibid., 17.

79 Ibid., 14.

80 See Augustine, City of God.

81 Herman Dooyeweerd, Roots of Western Culture, trans. John Kraay. (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1979), 15-17.

82 See ~~Romans chapters 6-8.~~ Rom. 6-8.

83 Santimire, The Travail of Nature, 210.

84 Ibid., 154.

85 Ruether, Gaia and God, 127.

CHAPTER 9

Axial Negativity toward Nature

We have been looking at the evolution of human societies, leading to the axial age with two questions in mind. In Chapter 2, we reviewed a few scholars who studied the axial age at close quarters from their respective fields of expertise. Their observations confirmed that religions enlivened by the axial revolution manifest, among other things, two noticeable traits. One, they display extreme negativity toward nature, and two they are all in some sense soteriologically oriented. These two dispositions continue to influence religion and societies of the present. Following this lead, we went on to probe how and where in the evolution of human societies these dispositions emerged. Since both these tendencies stem from human-world relations, we focused on human attitudes toward the world at different epochs. Our survey led us from primal societies through archaic, urban, national and imperial societies. The advent of the imperial epoch brought us to the doorstep of the axial age.

What became obvious was that the anti-nature and soteriological stances grew in intensity with each step in this development. Ancient humans were largely unaware that they were increasingly assimilating and reinforcing these attitudes and that their treatment of the world was largely motivated by these stances. We also saw that many of the human predicaments of the ancient world were directly related to the human use of the environment. By the imperial period, the alienation of humans from nature was almost complete, and axial thoughts sealed it firmly. Nature was disenchanted and came to be viewed in rational and non-religious terms. Greeks and Jews should be credited

with this. Jews saw human discontinuity with the nonhuman world and placed humans above nature. Greeks of the classical period came to view nature in rational and scientific terms and advocated that it existed purely for human ends. Some Greek philosophies went to the extent of devaluing nature completely.

As to the reasons why such a negative attitude toward life and nature could come about, our attention was drawn to the tumultuous history of the pre-axial epochs. Our readings of these epochs have made it clear that such dispositions were prompted by the social unrest and disruptions caused by the growing failure of the environment to sustain human communities, especially at the core centers. Societies at the core centers came to suffer severe disruption and deterioration on all fronts. Social upheavals – the violence, wars, and the oppression – were all rooted in the environmental crisis. The degradation of ecological niches themselves was caused in large measure by the changes taking place on the wider planetary front and in climate. Changes in the environment nudged human societies to cross from one threshold to the other. Every threshold crossing brought with it rising population and dwindling food resources, and intensified the environmental crisis in the local bioregional niches. Environmental failures and the population pressure set off social unrest and upheaval in the core centers. Unlike the primal days, nature was turning out to be malevolent and human engagement with the environment turned increasingly confrontational. Confrontation with nature spilled over into confronting and pillaging societies that had ready access to food and resources from the environment. When the environment continued to fail, social unrest, conflicts and wars spread vigorously. With it also came all social evils and ignominious institutions of the preaxial age. Disenchantment with life in general – with nature, society, corporeal existence, and

religion – all came crashing down on axial humans. Nature was seen now as an antagonist to all human advance, happiness and aspirations. There was no option but to forsake her and seek liberation from all that ties humans to terrestrial and physical existence.

This negativity toward nature was not conspicuous, nor was it articulated out-right by the ancient humans. It was nevertheless intertwined with and reflected in the religious worldviews, philosophies and cultic exercises. Although ancient humans rejected nature, they did not look at their plight and predicament from an environmental perspective. They failed to grasp the nexus between the environmental crisis and its impact on human societies. Since ancient humans were mythologically disposed, they explained their predicament in mythical terms. To overcome their predicaments, ancient societies came to appropriate more and more resources from the environment. They believed that the increase in human numbers was desirable in the midst of vast untapped environmental resources. Nature's resources must be appropriated through conquest and pillaging, by enlarging and intensifying human control over nature, and over human societies that had ready access to nature and its bounties. Ancient humans did not anticipate nature failing them completely; rather humans were thought to be at fault for not enlarging human influence and control over nature to obtain all that nature had to offer. It is in this desire to extend human influence and seize more of nature that we see the rise of imperialism that provided the ethos for the advance of the axial mentality.

Both written and archeological records provide ample evidence for this depressing reading of human story. These records speak volumes of the incessant conflicts between human societies of this time. Wars and conflicts were typically rooted in the failure of

biological niches to meet the demands of the burgeoning societies that lived on them. Most wars are ultimately environmental in origin. Humans annihilate other humans in order to have access to more resources. In hindsight, we who observe the history of these epochs fathom the evil engendered by the collapse of the agrarian and pastoral economies in the ancient world. Evils unleashed by wars of the ancient world must therefore be seen also in the environmental light.

Nonetheless, written records are rather silent on the ecological roots of these conflicts and wars. It is quite understandable that ancient humans did not see their conflicts and social unrest in an environmental light. Neither the prophets, nor the philosophers interpreted the tumultuous history of this period in ecological terms. They usually wrote about human relations with each other and their gods and seldom about the relations of humans with nature. We find hardly any records, written or otherwise, of ancient agricultural and pastoral practices. Human encounter with nature did not feature prominently in their thinking, culture and arts. Ancient literature and art overwhelmingly depict anthropocentric motifs of urbanism, imperialism, slavery and wars. They were sponsored by the monarch and the urban bureaucrats. Artists, scribes and prophets seldom possessed the knowledge to ascertain the essential nexus between human modes of existence and the dynamics of the biological niches within which humans found themselves. Most axial prophets and philosophers were urbanites and perhaps a few of them were aristocrats. Except for a handful that lived by farming and herding, most did not live in the countryside with close proximity to raw nature. Even if they did write about the countryside, they did so as urbanites looking at the struggles of rural life. But what they did record of the social upheaval and the tumultuous history of this period

turned out to be proxy records of the human abuse of nature and the widespread environmental crises.

The axial mindset proffered an alternate mode of human existence from all that proceeded it. It sought a radical break from the earlier grounds for religious existence. The starting premise of all axial traditions was that human existence was defective, unsatisfactory and lacking in all respects.[1] Indeed, there was a widespread discontent with life. The quality of human life had deteriorated considerably, especially during the closing centuries of the last millenium B.C.E. Axial thoughts kindled hopes for a new beginning.

The movement engendered a radical transformation of human awareness and values. It transformed the core of human being – the psyche. The transformation, of course, was forged by violent social and environmental events of that day. Jaspers understood the axial revolution as a self-driven dynamic forged within human self-understanding. He writes, "Axial period appears to me to be situated at a much deeper level . . . in the whole conscious thinking aspect of humanity."[2] But Jaspers did not identify the external causes that led to the internal changes. John Hick, on the other hand, could only say that the axial age was prepared by large-scale events that encompassed many different ancient cultures at the core centers for millennia.[3] Hick did not elaborate what these large-scale events were. Going beyond Jaspers and Hick, John Cobb described axial development in terms of the transformation of the human psyche -- the shifting of the "seat of existence" corresponding to and effected by the human crossings of thresholds from one epoch to the other.

Following the lead given by Cobb, we reread the axial developments in wider contexts of human-world existence. We found that the social and environmental events of the first two millenniums B.C.E. radically transformed human values and awareness. Internally, the shift made the societies to unshackle themselves of the affinity to their bioregional, cultural and religious identities.

The axial paradigm shift was caused by, among other things, external events like the spread of imperialism and the dispersal of societies during the first two millennia B.C.E. Imperialism coerced human societies into imbibing universal and individualistic values and a teleology at the expense of giving up one's own cultural and "geographic religion." Cults that were confined to the social and biological moorings were exchanged for those grounded in global, communal and personal values. Imperialism itself was driven by larger external events such as the collapse of agrarian and pastoral economies at the core centers. As we showed, these economies collapsed due to the changes in the environment. The growing desiccation and the advance of deserts beginning from mid-Holocene epoch (around 6000 B.C.E.) were caused by still larger planet-wide changes that were ultimately caused by changes in the orbital patterns of the planet in relation to the sun. These changes were noticeable from the early to mid-Holocene period, 12,000 to 6000 B.C.E.

In this study, we had turned the spotlight on the external causes for the rise of axial revolutions. External events caused profound internal changes -- in human thoughts and understanding. However, internal changes were less visible at the time when the axial revolution was in the making. As various axial traditions unfolded, the changes became quite visible and potent. While most of the axial values were welcome, some were quite

negative, especially the ones that dealt with nature. These negative tenets had enormous implications for human-world relations and their scourge has not spared modern societies either.

Nature, Religion and Culture

In our introductory chapter, we had sought to understand religion in a larger context. Religion is at the heart of any culture. Religion defines and provides meaning to the culture in question. This is also true of secular ideologies that often function like religions. As such, secular ideologies also define those cultures within which they operate. Culture moves and motivates societies. Societies are set within bioregional and larger environmental contexts. Bioregions are part of the wider global and planetary spheres. Changes in the wider spheres effect changes in smaller spheres. Thus we find that societies and cultures affected by changes in the wider spheres are in a state of constant flux. Societies and cultures change and evolve in response to the changes in the environment as well as due to creative or destructive ways in which humans respond to external changes. Our study showed the changes that occurred as societies crossed from one threshold to the other. Changes in the society and culture bring about changes in the religious systems of the societies in question. Understanding how the changes in the external world cause changes in the internal religious mindset of humans can help us understand why axial movements show negativity toward nature and toy with soteriological motifs.

As we showed, the axial movement was a response to the human experience of the failing environment and the society of the pre-axial times. Human experiences of the external world and the violent events caused tectonic shifts within human psyche. Karl

Jaspers was right in calling this shift "axial." External swirls forced the psyche to turn on its axis. The axial torque was forged by the shifting grounds that occurred both internally and externally. Shifting grounds affected societies and cultures, which in turn transformed the human psyche and consequently the religious mentality. Shifting of environmental grounds rearranged the moorings of cultures and religions of societies at the core centers. We have earlier referred to this shift as the "paradigm shift." John Cobb understands this as an accentuation of "some elements in the background and by a restructuring of existence around a new center."[4] This new center provided the frame of reference for that particular society. Cobb writes,

> The process of the development of new structures of existence shares this balance of continuity and discontinuity . . . . The new structure arises by the increase or heightening of some element or elements in the old structure. Such intensification may be very gradual, and it may be impossible to say at exactly what point the boundaries of the old structure are broken. Nevertheless, the relative strengthening of some element in the old can in the end lead to a regrouping of all the elements, bringing about a quite new range of possibilities for further development. The new structure is discontinuous with the old, although the process by which it came into being was continuous. This emergence of discontinuity within a continuous process will be called the crossing of a threshold.[5]

Being at the heart of any culture, religion provides the meaning and the legitimacy for a culture of a society in question. All religious and social values and ethics proceed from the organizing center. All gestalts received from nature, culture, community, history and those perceived intuitively, mystically and mythically are filtered through this organizing center. Organizing centers develop their own symbols, tenets and cultic exercises. As we said in the introduction to this study, the gamut of religion is so vast that it is forced to develop and employ its own language. The language of religion is different from that of the normal conversation or scientific enterprise. Much of this religious language is

wrapped up in myths and cultic exercises. As an in-house language, it makes sense only to those who are familiar with it. Could any one of these languages become universal so that every one will understand it?

Religious languages strive to espouse a comprehensive frame of reference -- the meaning of human existence and experience in the universe. They are not merely confined to transmitting historical facts; rather they also include what takes place outside history. Joseph Campbell calls these "sacred dreams" and says that they articulate events and realities that are beyond human rationality and senses.[6] They expound the creation of the universe and human presence within it in a nonscientific way. Sacred Dreams make mundane natural events comprehensible and meaningful to ordinary humans. They provide non-scientific explanations for such normal events as sunrise and sunset, thunder and lightning, earthquakes, floods, drought, eclipses, comets etc. and present them as the frolicking or skirmishes of gods, sacred beings, or semi-divine heroes and heroines. They take into account the complexity of the role and place of many agents constituting a situation or causing a particular event happen. Even nonhuman nature -- both animate and inanimate -- is seen to be taking an active and intentional role in the events. Ultimately religious myths invite humans to apprehend and share realities beyond those that are observable, and can be experienced and verified in time and space.

Myth making is universal, and some common themes and motifs run through myths in every culture and age. A study of comparative mythology shows that many figures such as sky gods, earth goddesses, gods of vegetation, the divine child, and the virgin mother are found widely in divergent cultures. Carl G. Jung maintains that these common themes occur in all cultures because they are *archetypes* derived from the "collective

unconsciousness" of the human psyche.[7] Archetypes of the primal and archaic myths have an integrated and comprehensive approach to the events of the past and to human presence, experience and aspirations in the world. The essential motifs of these myths are transmitted through the ages, not in their original guise, but in transmuted forms that conform to the local cultural and bioregional ethos. As such, we see variations and dichotomies from region to region and generation to generation. Due to changes in the biological niches, societies were forced to create new myths and cults that resonate with the changing conditions. As humans crossed successive thresholds, old myths and gods were discarded for new ones.

Hunting and gathering myths integrated human presence and experiences with the process and events of nature. Nature, the great *Magna Mater,* provided the overarching frame of reference of human existence and experience. The process and cycles of nature provided ever-present meaning for human existence. Humans along with all flora and fauna were viewed as those who made up the great family of the *Magna Mater*. All constituent entities were actively involved in the enduring cosmic drama. The whole cosmic story was enacted, affirmed, recounted and experienced repeatedly through communal rituals, dances, totemic cults, and shamans' magic and medicine. Motifs of the primal narratives affirmed the permanence and benevolence of nature. Categories for the narratives were drawn from the mythical taxonomies of nature. Such taxonomies show continuities rather than contrasts between the human and non-human world. These were reflected in the way human experiences were narrated and enacted through animal characters and stories. Primal people held that animal spirits could cross over with ease and indwell humans and vice versa. Stories of humans as well as of the spirits and the

supernatural forces were all enmeshed in the narratives of nature. Nature was the organizing ground for both humans and the divine. Thus the primal narratives celebrated nature and affirmed her essential benevolence and bounties. Nature was for the primal people, indeed, enchanted.

Then came the agrarian revolution. At this time, we witness the gradual development of distinct and interactive roles between humans and nature. Archaic agrarians looked at nature as something that could be modified to human ends. The unity motifs of the primal myths gave way to motifs of cooperation, mutuality and partnership between different entities. The sky gods and the earth goddesses, though distinct, were not antagonistic to each other. They interacted with each other to ensure the fecundity of both humans and nature through the ever-changing cycles and seasons. Agrarian revolution was structured on the fertility ideology – an ideology that affirmed the procreative purposes of all entities in nature. The myths conveyed mutuality between humans, nature and gods. Gods could be easily domesticated and enticed. So was nature. In archaic times, humans effected decisive changes in the environment and transformed selected plant and animal species for human ends. In spite of these decisive changes, archaic societies continued to see continuity between humanity and nature and to hold that their destinies were intimately bonded.

During the ancient urban epoch, humans come to view themselves as somewhat distinct from nature and not being caught up in its vagaries and cycles. Nature was viewed instead as that which existed for human pleasure and welfare and, therefore, humans had the right to deal with it as they pleased. The distancing of humans from nature enabled societies to control and direct the course of their immediate environment

rather than be controlled by it. Humans become masters of nature and saw themselves placed above nature. In this context, the art of myth-making assumed an ideological twist. A gradual emergence of a dichotomy between different characters of the drama can be observed. The mutuality and the compatibility of the archaic epoch came to assume somewhat rigid, autonomous and confrontational roles. The characters of the archaic players -- gods, humans and nature -- who till then were mutually bonded, began to diverge and seek their own destinies. For the first time, it seemed feasible and appropriate to narrate the story of humans detached from the stories of nature and gods. Yet the monads did not completely walk away from each other. All that happened was that the power relations between the playmates -- gods, humans and nature -- was beginning to be defined in a hierarchical order. Primal egalitarianism and archaic agrarian mutualism gave way to hierarchy, domination and control. Primal and agrarian myths were thus recast to reflect the transformation taking place both in the society and on the environmental front. Stories of both gods and nature were dunked and asphyxiated in the story of humans. Humans, who until then were integrated with the primal myths, were extricated from nature's clasp and syndicated more with the sagas of gods. The hierarchical order required mediators between gods and nature. Gods needed an agent – an interlocutor to relate to the creation. The Babylonian creation myths, which provided the basic motifs for the Biblical stories of the creation, the Garden of Eden and Noah's Ark, show that the essential role for which humans were created was to take care of God's creation. Accordingly, God had to create humans in God's image and put them as superintendents of the creation. And God remained ever vigilant to ensure that humans carried out the tasks entrusted to them. Should something go awry, God would

have to destroy all humans and nature and make way for a new order to emerge. Such motifs could only grow within an urban-agrarian economy and ethos whose ideology fostered the idea that nature as well as the common folk (agrarian laborers, artisans and women) by themselves are unruly and not sagacious and that they can only be fecund and productive so long as the urban gentry exercise power, control and domination over them. Nature is no longer the arena of divine creativity, and when it fails or does not respond the way humans want, it becomes evil in their sight. And all those who are closely associated with Mother Earth -- farmers, herdsmen, laborers, artisans, tribal people, primal people, women and children -- are of low esteem and prone to evil. It is now left to humans to deal with nature as they please. And if humans could not set it right, humans have the option to create their own brave world -- a New World of the walled city.

Sumer embodies the essence of ancient urban ideology. Urbanism is the second great revolution in human cultural evolution. Sumer was not the first urban center. Cities like Jericho existed much before Sumerian civilization could emerge. Nevertheless, the essential ideology of history --the rejection of nature -- was perhaps witnessed earlier in cities of Sumer and Greece than anywhere else. The urbanite outlook on nature was rather ambivalent. Nature was viewed not so much as a sphere of human subsistence, but as an impediment to human advance or an evil force from which humans should flee. For this reason, they created a world away from the menacing wilderness. Such an ideology was backed by the view that nature was chaotic and therefore fit to be dominated, controlled and ordered by human ingenuity and interventions. Ancient urban civilization is marked by fortified cities. They served as the symbols of security and power for the

whole land. A fortress on a citadel with a monarch and his palace at the center with a central temple or cultic site served as the organizing principle for the whole land. The ancient urban myth was symbolized in fortified cities. Walled cities symbolized permanence, security and hope for the citizens. Captives, foreigners, sojourners and caravan traders of the ancient world always turned in the direction of their central cultic cities for daily prayers.[8] Humans can now withdraw and insulate themselves from the menacing wilderness, boorish agrarians and artisans, and marauding tribes. From the security of the walled city, humans can now safely domesticate, control and direct the wild world and the common folk out there. Sumerian myths thus came to narrate the divine-human drama against the backdrop of a menacing nature and marauding tribes that needed to be crushed and subdued. Nature was no longer an active player in the drama. Rather, humans became the most important players. While the sagas of human and gods were syndicated, nature merely provided the backdrop for the drama to be unfolded. Urban ideologies of the Mesopotamian deserts thus hastened the parting of gods, humans and nature from one another.

While the Sumerians sought to subdue nature, Greeks of the classical times demythologized nature. Greek philosophers sought to understand nature in rational and scientific terms. In trying to understand the world rationally, Greeks sought to eschew myths of nature and sought to replace it with logos. Logos is rational, pragmatic and scientific. If the world can be understood as causes and effects, humans will function well within it and exercise greater control over nature. Unlike mythos that merely provides the overarching meaning of existence, logos understands facts that correspond to realities as they exist. Rational understanding of the world opens the way to discover

new things in nature. Logos helps to create novel things that enhance human welfare and enjoyment. But logos has its limitations. It cannot assuage evil in the world and human pain and sorrow. It cannot answer questions about ultimate values of human life. In trying to understand nature in rational terms, Greeks stripped nature of all mythical and positive values.

Although the classical Greece was moving toward secular existence free from religious holds, it still had to face up to the problem of evil. Where could the source of evil be found? For Greeks evil was where it was confronted – at the environmental front. As such, some Greek philosophies came to identify evil in the material existence. These Greeks of the axial times held the material world as the source of evil and the spiritual realm as the source of virtue. Therefore, humans must reject nature and seek a spiritual realm. Nature must be devalued against human spirit. This Greek negativity toward nature spurted largely from the experience of the failing environment, the agrarian economies and the urban problems associated with them. Negativity toward nature brought dualities of all sorts between spiritual and the material, rural and urban, and body and soul. By the time the axial age rolled by, Greek religions were in disarray and were losing vivacity. Gods of nature had failed them and had to be discarded. Cities in Greece were at war with each other. Greek religions lacked an organizing principle -- a central temple cult or a supreme deity that could unify the sundry city cults. Greeks also lacked a national history that would unify them as one people. In spite of their lofty ideals of democracy and humanism, the cities of Greece fell an easy prey to the imperial tide. Greek imperialists reasoned that their hegemony would arrest the collapse of societies

and economies of the Levant and the Fertile Crescent. In pursuit of their hegemony, Greeks waged wars against nature and society and established the Greek Empire.

Both in Sumer and in Greece of the classical times, nature myths were losing their relevance to be meaningful and their power to evoke moral response. As depicted in the Epic of Gilgamesh, humans were now thought of as the primary agents of values and change. Nature was pushed to the background. A new medium had to emerge that would serve as the organizing medium and carry the moral force. It was found in the narration of the human saga. It was in Sumer that the human history becomes a viable medium for offering meaning and purpose to human existence. Nature and gods need not be entreated. Now the human story is narrated without entwining it with the sagas of gods and nature, because the purpose of life is not evident in nature. God is not in nature; nor is truth multiple.[9] Nature was deprived of its potential to narrate the story of the gods and humans. History is thus a pure narration of facts and stories about humans. But much of the ancient history is about the dynastic reigns of monarchs, emperors and their reign. Thus as Samuel Kramer contends in his book, History Begins at Sumer, for the first time in the evolution of human societies, the contingency of narrating the human saga apart from that of the nature and gods befell the Sumerian city-states. The imperial powers that ensued bought into the Sumerian legacy of historicism. Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry write,

> In the modern period, we are without a comprehensive story of the universe. The historians, even when articulating world history, deal not with the whole world but just with the human, as if the human were something separate from or an addendum to the story of the Earth and the universe. The scientists have arrived at detailed accounts of the cosmos, but have focused exclusively on the physical dimensions and have ignored the human dimension of the universe.[10]

The art of history then is to read the human saga as the prime event of the universe and to entreat all other events as subservient to it. Sumerians were the first to perceive the human drama as the central event of the universe. And they employed the art of writing to articulate this event very effectively. The Sumerian brand of historicism thus came to be the bedrock of the art of history writing and of Western civilization. The fundamental tenet of history is the defense of the estrangement of humans from nature and the conviction that human progress and exploits are central to the cosmic events and that untamed nature is an antagonist to human advance, an untamed beast out there waiting to be controlled and subdued by human ingenuity. Paul Shepard maintains that

> the idea of history is itself a Western invention whose central theme is the rejection of habitat. It formulates experience outside of nature and tends to reduce place to location. To it, the plains and passes of the desert fringe are only a stage upon which the human drama is enacted. History conceives the past mainly in terms of biography and nations. It seeks causality in the conscious, spiritual, ambitious character of men and memorializes them in writing.[11]

Given Shepard's love and passion for primal values and ways of life,[12] we do not think that his judgment on history is overly harsh.

Nevertheless, it would be unfair to credit the West with all the negativity toward nature. The art of history writing evolved and was refined millennia before Western historians could adopt it and become masters at it. However, writing was not originally invented for recording history. Rather it was invented and employed to record economic transactions and especially developed by the temple scribes who kept records of the stocks in the storehouses and the food distribution to the common people. It was much later, when the powers and hierarchy had developed, that writing was used to record history. In fact, it was the Sumerians and the Babylonians who used writing extensively

for recording history as they understood it. History for them was the exploits of their monarchs, the brutal subjugation of the vassals, the common people and the environment for enhancing the status of the emperors, monarchs, warlords and urban bureaucrats. For Sumerians, Assyrians and Babylonians, history was all about the exploits of their monarchs and warlords. Some of the earliest records of history are about the early dynastic period in Sumer from 2900 to 2400 B.C.E. A series of documents known as the Sumerian King Lists, engraved on clay tablets belonging to the late third millennium, provide an account of ancient kings going back thousands of years.[13] Most of the legal and moral codes of this era like the Code of Hammurabi -- a collection of Babylonian laws developed during the reign of Hammurabi (1792-1750 B.C.E.) -- were essentially enacted to justify and legitimize the privileges of the monarchs and the bureaucrats. Paul Shepard is right in that the essential ideology of history – "the rejection of habitat" -- was formalized when the art of history writing was mastered and standardized by the Greeks, Romans and the Christian West. However, the seeds of this rejection were sown by the city dwellers of Sumer and nurtured by the imperial powers that grew in the Fertile Crescent centuries before the dawn of Christian era.

The genesis of the art of writing down history, urbanization, imperialism and the rejection of nature grew hand in hand in the ancient world. Once the art of history writing was contrived, the urban, followed by imperial ideologies, came to permeate every area of human existence in the ancient society. Life became fragmented. Communities and cultures were destroyed. It was then that specialists developed their own sectarian interests and employed the art of narration to advance their own vested interests. Thus, the prophet and priests came to narrate the stories of gods. The court

historians narrated the story of humans, especially the stories of monarchs and emperors. The philosopher-scientists, artists and poets took up the task of expounding the process and taxonomies of nature. The myths of nature were replaced by numerous other myths – myths of history, messianic and eschatological myths, humanistic and personalistic values,[14] and rational and scientific worldviews.

The ancient urban ideology as propounded here was not written down as such. Until recently, it was not even discerned as a fundamental tenet of the urban and imperial designs. With the dawn of the age of ecology and the rise of green awareness, we are able to discern its uncanny presence in the various idiosyncrasies of urban and imperial societies, both ancient and modern. In fact, students of history laud the urbanism of yesterday for its ingenuity. "The golden age" of cities and civilizations, royal palaces and their harems, chivalry and pomposity enrapture all of us. In fact, archeology thrives on yearnings for the "lost civilizations." Historians and anthropologists brood over their demise. Most textbooks on world history list the contributions early cities and imperial centers made to the advancement of human culture, especially to the fields of mathematics, astronomy, architecture, metallurgy, law, education, medicine, and government. Yet, what has not been apparent to the students of archeology and history until recently is the insidious ambiance of the urban and imperial ideologies -- their outright rejection of nature.

On the other hand, we need to acknowledge that not all ancient cultures and ethnic histories rejected nature. Egypt did not reject nature. Although Egypt could boast of a history that was ancient and continuous, the art of history and writing were not the primary vehicles for transmission of its culture. Egypt's culture was transmitted more

through its burial artifacts, structures and temple cults than by anything else. Egyptian religion and culture came to symbolize the essential goodness of nature and human dependence on it. Egyptians did not see their history outside of nature.

In the case of Israel, we find that the art of history – both oral and written narrations – were used to transmit and reinforce Israel's religious social values and traditions. During the four centuries of its monarchical existence, Israel's history was remembered and re-enacted through its cultic exercises, festivals and the observance of the law. Israel's awareness as a nation was wrapped up in the covenant ideology. Israel's national ideology was set in the covenant Yahweh had made with the patriarchs and its people. Covenant history integrated the sagas of Yahweh, Israel and the land. Yahweh's promises to the wandering patriarchs, Exodus event, sojourn in the wilderness and the occupation of the Promised Land were the milestones on which the plot of Israel's history was pegged. For this reason, Israel's history was also bound up with the story of the Promised Land. Israel's history had no teleological purpose other than the covenantal existence in the Promised Land. All social, personal and land ethics flowed from Israel's covenantal existence. But the land ethics that flowed from the covenantal ideology was highly utilitarian. In the mindset of Israelites, nature did not exist for its own sake. It had no intrinsic value other than to serve human ends. The land belonged to Yahweh. Yahweh bestowed the land upon Israel. Israel was commanded to live on the land, enjoy its fruits and nurture it. Therefore, ultimately Israel was accountable to Yahweh for the way the land was used and its fruits were enjoyed and shared. In spite of the utilitarian excesses, Israel did not reject nature per se, but Israel also did not romanticize it.

On the heals of the urban civilization grew imperialism in the Fertile Crescent and the Levant. Axial movements unfolded with the spread of imperialism. Unlike Israel and Egypt, imperialists of the Akkadian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Persian and Greek empires viewed nature with hostility and disdain and sought to subdue her with all their might. For them, nature was something to be dominated and ordered primarily for human use. Imperial ideologies, especially those that developed in Babylon and Greece, advanced the belief that humans were the most important species in the universe, and nature had no purpose other than to serve human ends. Nature was regarded as an alien, and human negativity toward nature became full blown. Imperial powers had least concern for the health and welfare of the bioregions or the people and of the provinces and colonies.

Nature suffered immensely during imperial times. Imperialism fractured communities and their affinity to the land. Imperialism functioned on the premise that nature must be subdued and plundered, for nature and the people who subsist on them exist to serve imperial powers and their fancies. Imperialists had no regard for ethnic histories and cultures. The world out there existed not for the common good, but as a territory over which imperialists could hold sway and establish their reign. Emperors became the ultimate symbols of all values and power. Society, culture, religion, nature and history – all must revolve around the imperial office. The emperor was the frame of reference for culture and society, and the source of all power and values. Imperial powers were claimed to be the center and object of history.

During the imperial epoch, gods and humans were totally extricated from nature. There was indeed no continuity between God, humans and nature. Nevertheless, both gods and humans (especially the imperial powers) needed to be grounded and find

legitimacy for their existence. They found this in each other's offices. Thus the gods of the imperialists were now syndicated with and grounded in the imperial office. Every emperor sought to create a cult of his own. From Pharaohs to Caesars, all emperors cast themselves as semi-divine objects of worship. But every one of them failed and the common people saw the folly of it all. Imperialism destroyed old cultural and religious moorings. New myths and values had to be created in their place.

While imperial forces sought to create their own cults and myths, common people not associated with or opposed to the imperial movements sought to create new values and novel ways of living in the world. By proffering novel values for living, they were able to transcend the excesses and follies of imperial ideologies. Prophets, philosophers and visionaries showed creative ways of living amidst the gloomiest of historical prospects and much evil in the society. Messianic movements, mystery cults and new philosophies proliferated. The groundswell of new values for living -- apocalypticism, secularism, rationalism, individualism, humanism, communalism, globalism, dualism, spiritualism, asceticism (especially in India) historicism, mysticism and monasticism -- opened the floodgates of axial movements all across the core centers. These movements profoundly influenced the way humans would view and deal with nature. Nature was still there and humans could not write off nature and its myths completely. Humans also had to address the problem of evil. Evil was everywhere. People had to explain its presence and source. They needed myths that would mitigate the horrendous evil encountered on all fronts. Myths of nature were not good enough. Nature's myths by themselves had no moral fortitude in arresting social disintegration. If they have to have ethical force, they should be wedded to the myths of gods or history or humans. Even historical myths by

themselves were of no use. Their promises vanish like the desert mirages. Kingdoms and empires fell one after the other. Imperial powers and ideologies shifted constantly. People could not peg their hopes and aspirations on the promise of their particular histories or that of the imperial powers. Common people detested being coerced into global collectives.

In these contexts, people now came to view themselves as shaped not so much by their local biological niches or their ethnic histories, but by the autonomous global, communal and personal existence. Axial movements took advantage of these situations and translated them into values for religion. Groups opposed to the imperial excesses saw the value in small groups and solidarity cells. They refused to march to the drumbeats of the global collectives. We see this in the way imperial powers of Rome persecuted the early church not so much for its worship of Christ, as for its refusal to worship Caesar. It was in this critical ethos that new social and personal values were engendered. The virtues of love and caring for one another grew in these contexts of close-knit communities and they had a powerful influence in the life and ministries of the early church.

On the other hand, axial movements also came to depend on "historical particulars." Historical particulars are central events that serve as the organizing foundation for the religious movements. It is immaterial whether such events occurred in the past or are expected in the future. Primitive Christianity came to be centered on the Jesus Event – Jesus' crucifixion, death and resurrection. This event served as the organizing principle of their cultic and communal existence. The rituals of baptism and communion revolve around the Jesus event. Although primitive Christianity grew initially within Jewish tradition, Jewish history and Mosaic Laws became meaningless when Christianity spread

in the Greco-Roman cities and Christianity had to opt for a new organizing center which it found in the Jesus event. For Jews, the expected coming of the messiah and the restoration of the temple cult are central to their religious existence. Some parallels of these can also be found in other axial traditions. Very often, these historical, social and personal particulars center on human individuals who are defied and made to attain superhuman qualities and characters. Many myths are created surrounding the life and death of such individuals to such an extent that these myths come to evoke awe and adoration for that individual among the faithful.

Nevertheless, in spite of these historical, social, local and personal particulars and the newfound communal and personal values for religion, for all practical purpose, axial peoples' attitude to the world of nature was largely negative. Primitive Christianity, especially the churches formed by Apostle Paul, grew in urban contexts of the Greco-Roman cities. People living in the Greco-Roman cities were largely removed from the rural agrarian settings. Environmentally they were alienated. Socially they lived within a hierarchically structured society made up of aristocrats, the landowners, artisans and slaves. Early Christians were drawn largely from the common people who lived in the cities. And early Christian groups -- caught up in the depths of despair and anxiety from the persecution perpetrated by the imperial powers of Rome -- overwhelmingly opted for apocalyptic aspirations. It is in these anonymous, urban, and global contexts that people came to seek liberation and redemption from the travails of terrestrial existence.

Imperial movements of the axial times had alienated humans from the world of nature. Axial humans must now aspire for a higher realm of existence -- a realm more enduring than the present one which is prone to decay and destruction. As we showed earlier, the

general premise of axial traditions begins with the conviction that the "human existence is defective, unsatisfactory, lacking,"[15] so that humans should seek liberation from this temporal existence to a realm that is durable and holistic. Axial soteriology promises not only a release from sickness, pains and death, but also a release from harsh human realities of the physical world. The pre-axial world was collapsing on all fronts – environmental, political, moral and social. Drastic changes were needed. Farming and pastoral pursuits were failing. Evils of urban and imperial advances brought misery both for the body and soul. Diseases, epidemics and starvation ravaged urban and rural societies. People were weary of this world. The world of nature could no longer be thought of as a source of human happiness and fulfillment. The liberation from the societal, terrestrial and corporeal decay alone would ensure eternal peace and rest. It was in this context that we see soteriological schemes acquiring eschatological and apocalyptic significance. Humans are now called to await the arrival of a New Heaven and a New Earth and the cessation of history. A New Heaven and a New Earth are desirable to a world out there that is disintegrating. A commitment to this soteriological scheme assures a place in the world to come. Of course, there were exceptions to these world-negating soteriologies. The Apostle Paul occasionally wrote about the redemption of the created world, and the Stoics affirmed life in this world. But these were too few and far between to be counter-effective to the overall thrust of the axial negativity toward nature and life. Ultimately, this axial negativity contributed to the human predilection for "cosmic homelessness" and a soteriology that sought an escape and a release from the temporality of this world. And this disposition of "cosmic homelessness" is fundamentally common to most, if not all axial traditions.

Notes
Chapter 9
Axial Negativity toward Nature

1 Hick, An Interpretation of Religion, 32.

2 Karl Jaspers, Origin and Goal of History.

3 Hick, 31.

4 Cobb, The Structure of Christian Existence, 23.

5 Ibid., 20-21.

6 Joseph Campbell, The Mythic Image (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 7-12.

7 Carl Gustav Jung, Analytical Psychology (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968), 46.

8 See Daniel 6:10.

9 Shepard, Nature and Madness, 57.

10 Swimme and Berry, The Universe Story, 1.

11 Shepard, Nature and Madness, 47.

12 Ibid., 47.

13 Andrews, First Cities, 27.

14 Cobb, 99. — which book?

15 Hick, 32.

EPILOGUE

Toward Earthism: A Spirituality for the Postmodern Age

Spirituality is a mode of religious existence. Axial movement is fundamentally a spiritual movement. But axial spirituality for the most part did not encompass the non-human world, because axial societies themselves were alienated from the non-human world. Although the axial spirituality was negative toward nature and corporeal existence, the axial commitment to liberation and transcendence from terrestrial existence nudged the revolution toward novel forms of religious experiences. Early Christians in the Greco-Roman cities experienced this spirituality in personal and group settings. Statistically speaking, these new modes of existence brought forth much that was good. Axial spirituality created new social and personal values and ethics unheard of in ancient societies. For the first time in history, humans were able to reach deep down into the depth of their psyche (soul) and draw out the needed moral and spiritual resources and ideals for living. They could do this without any recourse to the world out there or invoking the spirit of nature or the force of history. At times, even the divine was ignored or not invoked. Some Eastern traditions have become successful in charting spiritual paths without invoking the divine grace. Such traits as purity of heart, humility, and sacrificial service to fellow human beings are born out of this approach. Along with personal values, axial spirituality also engendered much communal values. Fellowship groups and solidarity cells that grew to serve the needs of alienated individuals engendered rich resources for social ethics and communal living. Movements that grew out of axial revolution thus came to hold great possibilities for transforming human

societies, individuals and cultures. The pursuit of a spiritual existence offers possibilities for the transformation of unsatisfactory human existence. It offers the possibility for satisfaction and fulfillment to individuals and communities. What is more, according to John Cobb, spiritual existence holds humans responsible for their actions and being in the world.[1] This is very promising indeed.

Indeed there are many variations of spiritual existence. It must be acknowledged that the personal and communal spiritualities of the axial movements were largely devoid of eco-spirituality.[2] It is clear from what we have shown that the grounds for religious existence were steadily truncated since the preaxial times. The spiritual existence that characterizes axial traditions itself was narrowly understood and experienced. Nature did not serve as a source of spirituality, especially among the traditions that grew in and around the Fertile Crescent. In rejecting the world and seeking liberation from all physical, material and terrestrial existence, axial movements made a decisive shift toward a transcending existence.

The discipline of religion, taught in the schools of higher learning is largely defined and understood by the norms and models provided by the axial traditions grounded on personal and social particularities and spiritualities. Many tenets of these traditions have evolved with and draw heavily from the anthropocentric and anti-nature motifs of the axial epoch. Most axial traditions, their cultic practices and spiritualities do not incorporate the non-human world. Anthropocentricism is their primary motif. Anthropocentricism is the truncation of divine grace largely to advance human welfare and power. The non-human world is denied access to the divine grace. Nature merely serves as a backdrop for the enactment of the theoanthropic (divine-human) drama. From

the preaxial times to the modern age, nature's intrinsic values have been gradually curtailed with instrumental values. It exists now merely to serve human ends. And the sanction to deal with nature in instrumental values was largely derived from the axial traditions. Ultimately, nature was excommunicated from the community of faith, especially in the axial traditions that grew in and around the Fertile Crescent. The net result is the disenchantment with nature that steer humanity toward self-destruction in destroying the non-human world.

This calls for a need to lay fresh grounds for a renewed understanding on religion and a new praxis of religion. We need a new social paradigm that integrates both humans and non-human world. The time is ripe for the axis to turn once again. The new paradigm must both transcend and transform human society in creative ways. If we seek to address the environmental crisis as a religious crisis, we need to opt for a spirituality that not only encompasses personal and communal exigencies, but also one that would embrace non-human world. Could Earthism, the emerging new spirituality advocated by John Cobb and others serve as the paradigm of the post-modern world?

History of religion point out that the prehistoric cults – cults that venerated the *Magna Mater* -- engendered pro-nature attitudes unlike the anti-nature attitudes proffered by historic religions of the post-axial age.[3] Could we prop up the *Magna Mater* or the Earth Mother cultures again? Or, should we opt for an alternate religious paradigm that is devoid of human arrogance and anti-nature stances? Recent conversations on the *Gaia* hypothesis,[4] Planetism, Earthism[5] and Holism,[6] as opposed to economism and anthropocentricism, point to alternative religious paradigms anticipated by a postmodern world. And this is where we see the possibilities for considering an eco-sensible non-

anthropocentric spirituality in Earthism. Nevertheless, Earthism needs to be on guard. Left to itself, it will slip down the treacherous path of idolatry so prevalent in some nature cults. Therefore, we plead for its affiliation with traditions that flout idolatry of any kind. On the other hand, Earthism as a theological strategy must doggedly affirm the ultimacy of both God and the World. It is indeed a challenge to the theists for whom God alone is absolute and ultimate.[7] The Earthism anticipated by the postmodern world will absorb the attention of scholars in the days to come. Would Christianity itself be part of those movements that anticipate a third paradigm shift in the dawn of the Age of Earthism? It is a question left open for further exploration.

Notes

Epilogue

1 Ibid., Cobb, The Structure of Christian Existence, 121.

2 Ibid., Veeraraj, "Eco-Spirituality and the Religious Community," Pan-Ecology.

3 Ibid., Eisler, The Chalice and the Blade, 23

4 James Lovelock, Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

5 Ibid., Cobb, The Structure of Christian Existence, 121.

6 Jan C. Smuts, Holism and Evolution (London: Macmillan, 1926).

7 John B. Cobb, Jr., God and the World (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Westminster Press, 1969).

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Author. "Title of Article." Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia. CD-Rom. Compton's New Media, 1995.

This is the correct form. →